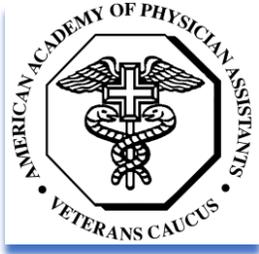


Veterans Caucus

An Affiliated Constituent Organization of the American Academy of Physician Assistants



March 2021

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2021 Topics in the Tropics Cancun Mexico

December 8-11, 2021

*Class Room Style Lectures in
Primary Care Topics*

*Lectures from 0700 to 1300 each
day*

*Remainder of the your day to
enjoy the each, pools,
recreational facilities and RELAX*

The Veterans Caucus Is Made Up of People who Care

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide up-to-date information to the members of the Veterans Caucus. The Board of Directors strive to ensure that the members are well informed and to foster a greater sense of community, and to build morale.

Please consider helping not only the Caucus, your fellow members but also the profession as a whole by considering to volunteer in some capacity within the organization.

If interested, please contact TJ Bonjour, President, at

TJbonjour@veteranscaucus.org

Message from the President

February 1, 2021

Dear Caucus Members,

On behalf of the Veterans Caucus and the Board of Directors, thank you for your continued support as we continue working for Veterans, PAs, and the next generation of PAs. Without a doubt 2020 was extremely difficult for many, yet I am excited as we usher in 2021 with renewed optimism. I have talked with many of you and remain amazed how each of you are truly making a difference in your communities. You have tirelessly and bravely cared for your patients and led the way as society recognizes you as a critical profession and the true heroes that you care! Keep up the great work and continue to be safe.

Despite AAPA 2021 - Philadelphia transitioning to a virtual conference, the Caucus remains committed and on track to award and recognize our annual PA student scholarships to well deserving PA students. Each will soon be a colleague on the medical front lines. I want to give a shout out to our private and military scholarship co-sponsors remaining steadfast and faithful! The Caucus is currently developing our traditional annual Memorial Day service yet in a virtual format. While it will have a different look, the legacy meaning will never change as we pay respect to our nation and our service members and veterans. Our bonds are stronger than ever as we continue working hand in hand for the betterment of all and appreciate their continued unwavering support.

Annual elections are upon us. Nomination packages for President-elect, 2 Director at Large positions, and a Student Representative are open from February 1 thru February 21, 2021 followed by formal elections February 22 thru March 26, 2021. Please consider serving in a formal board position or on a committee. With some additional downtime this year, the Board of Directors are updating our Policy and Procedures Manual and By-Laws which govern the day to day Caucus business. Historically, elected positions could only be held by a Veteran. We realize this is out of date and are pursuing Board of Director positions that would be open to non-Veterans but we must balance this initiative

Message from the President-Cont

within the legal confines of our tax-exempt IRS code status. There will be more to come on this so please stay tuned; we are listening to our membership!

Regarding *Topics 2021*, we are still planning for a face to face conference. **SAVE THE DATE: December 8 – 11, 2021 will be the Veterans Caucus 30th Anniversary of Topics in the Tropics and we look forward to seeing you in Cancun!** We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic as the date nears always concerned with the health, safety, and well-being of our guests and members in mind.

Despite a challenging year, we met our goals increasing our membership by 20%, further optimizing our website and social media communication platforms, and working tirelessly to rekindle industry sponsorships focused on Veterans and our membership while continuously driving onward giving back thru scholarships, local charity partnerships, and our annual keystone CME event. The Veterans Caucus is an organization of servant leaders and honored with your continued support.

Timothy J. "T.J." Bonjour, DSc, PA-C, Lt Col USAF (Ret)
President 2020-2021

Student Veteran Challenges to Becoming a PA

There comes a time during that sensitive transition period from military life to civilian life that one has to face the challenges of a career change. We may have stumbled along the way or at times felt completely lost. Perhaps you were able to find a mentor in the field that you were interested in and they took you under their wings. As Physician Assistants and Veterans of the United States Military, I want us all to reflect on the journey that brought you to where you are today. There is a good chance that you have experienced challenges that a recently discharged service member will likely have to look forward to in the coming years. However, with the continued rise of our profession and demands of higher-level civilian certification and degrees, the prospect for a young veteran to pursue the profession may seem daunting or even unobtainable. How does one who has served in the military in any capacity for any number of years compete with a more traditional student with a fortified academic record? I hope to help shed some light on the challenges of prospective and current veteran PA students.

One of the first hurdles is figuring out how to qualify to apply. Each PA program has its own set of prerequisites. Particularly for those who may have already earned a bachelor's degree, they may find that their science courses have exceeded the life-span of what PA programs recognize as acceptable. Veterans who fall in this category either have to decide if it is worth pursuing another bachelor's degree from the ground up or take multiple community college courses. This decision alone can very often deter veterans from pursuing the profession. There is the prospect of taking anywhere between 2 to 4 years just to meet the prerequisites. Given a choice to begin work where maybe their previous military experience allows them to immediately start working or at least gives them a head start can disincentivize one from wanting to apply.

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"If you read enough biography and history, you learn how people have dealt with successfully or unsuccessfully with similar situations or patterns in the past. It doesn't give you a template of answers, but it does help you refine the questions you have to ask yourself."
Jim Mattis



Cancun Mexico

"Lectures till ONE; then Fun in the Sun"

“Reflections of My Reflections; How the Tides Keeps Changing or do they?”

By Mike Milner

As I sit in living room, gazing out at the water and waves of the harbor, I keep noticing that the “Tide is Changing”... the waves are constantly moving in and out and leaving marks along the beach below my balcony. What I am struck by, is that, even though it is always moving, it really doesn't change that much; If I look at it again in 6 hours, it will be the same and this repeats over and over, twice each day for high and low tide. The overall impression on the beach really doesn't change much except after a big storm!

It reminds me of the Veterans Caucus. Really you say, the Veterans Caucus and the Tide have similarities. Let me explain. I have been a PA since 1984 and have been a member of the Veterans Caucus since 1982, first as a student member and then as a fellow member starting after graduation. I have seen the Caucus have strong growth and expansion, and then watched it as it retracted, regrouped and reengaged. I have served on the Board of Directors three other times in my life as a military PA and Veteran. I served twice in the elected role of President Elect, then President and then Past President. I have watched our Caucus deal with ups and downs of membership, growing and expanding the number and value of our scholarships, promoting our Annual Memorial Ceremony, and hosting our annual CME fundraiser, “Topics in the Tropics”. In reflecting on my three plus decades as a Caucus member and my third time in service on the Board, I have been struck by how we've change but never really change!

Growing membership is the life blood of any organization; we have tried unsuccessfully since our inception to recruit the bulk of our ACTIVE DUTY PAs into our fold, each time, being disappointed in the very small numbers of active duty PAs who actually join our ranks. Why don't they join? They believe in the same things we believe in, right? Selfless service, Duty, Honor, Courage, Sacrifice, Country, our brothers and sisters we stand shoulder to shoulder with. Is their lack of membership in the Veterans Caucus due to our \$35 annual dues requirement? Or is it something else? Is it our name....VETERANS CAUCUS?

We have fellow PAs as members who have not served in uniform; what makes them want to join us? In our by-laws, due to AAPA caucus status rules, they were allowed to belong but because they are PA's. But our incorporating documents forbid these fellow non uniformed PA's who support our work fully from holding office as a board of director. They donate money for scholarships to honor a lost loved one and we accept their donations; they attend our CME and donate their time and treasure to lecture, sharing their clinical expertise with our group and we gladly accept their efforts and registration fees, they purchase silent auction items every year at our annual Memorial Ceremony and we gladly accept their money, but they can't serve on our Board and help lead and guide our organization. Maybe this part of our bylaws needs to change to leave a different mark on the beach? Let's make any PA who supports our missions be eligible to serve and lead as a board member. By-Law changes are not hard to do.

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"The soldier is the Army. No army is better than its soldiers. The Soldier is also a citizen. In fact, the highest obligation and privilege of citizenship is that of bearing arms for one's country"

George S. Patton Jr.



"The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him."

G.K. Chesterton



"Reflections on My Reflections" (cont.)

Maybe it's time to really consider what we are and what we do and where we want to go as an organization. I for one would like to see the Veterans Caucus make some changes that could change with the tide and leave lasting impressions on the beach. How about changing our name to be more inclusive...."The Uniformed Services and Veterans Caucus of the AAPA"would this be an enticement to our active duty PAs to join our ranks and support our unique missions which are altogether different from the missions of the Society of Army PA's, Society of Air Force PAs, Public Health Association of PA's and Naval Association of PA's. Those active duty groups purposes and missions are clearly different and while they all support PA's (as does the Veterans Caucus), the active duty needs of PAs is their first priority. Those active duty brothers and sister PAs are also ALL VETERANS, and when they leave their active branches, they know they will have a welcome home with us. Join us now while you still serve on active duty. Give it some thought.

Modifying organizational bylaws to let interested folks serve in leadership roles is an 'easy button' in my opinion. A harder thing to do is improve how we look to our potential Veteran PA students and fellow PAs who have grown up in a more accepting world. I recall the first couple of young women who were accepted in the Air Force PA program in my early days in the profession. Things were different then and the number of women in uniform was small. But today, fully 20 percent of the uniformed services are women and that number grows daily; you never saw a female pilot at Luke Air Force Base but now, women combat fighter pilots command squadrons and retired military combat veterans serve in the US Congress. I grew up with MLK...Judging folks by the content of their character...and wonder if our perception to potential new members is somehow jaded. Is the Veterans Caucus "fully accepting" of all those who serve and have served our Nation in uniform or are we just seen as a "good ole boys club"? Are we as inclusive and tolerant as we think or say we are or are we just coming in and going out like the tide, without changing the impression on the beach?

Do we mentor young PAs who are climbing up the ladder enough? Do we help our Veteran PA student members find awesome clinical rotations with our own Veteran Caucus members? Do we truly believe in our stated mission to promote the interests and contributions of the veteran through service, education and fraternity? Are we really a group of people who care? Can we do more, be more and positively impact our world more? Can we leave a new and different impression on the beach, or will the next decade be like my reflections of the past three, an organization just coming and going like the tide, not changing much and therefore, not making much change on the beach?

Maybe it's time for a STORM!

I would love to hear "your reflections" about "my reflections". Please write me at: mmilner@veteranscaucus.org

Mike Milner, DHSc, PA-C, DFAAPA
Rear Admiral, US Public Health Service, (retired)
Treasurer, Veterans Caucus of the AAPA

Important Dates

National Freedom Day	Feb. 1
Iwo Jima Flag Raising	Feb. 23
Star Spangled Banner Day	Mar. 3
National Medal of Honor Day	Mar. 25
Vietnam Veterans Day	Mar. 29
Army Day	Apr. 6
National Former POW Day	Apr. 9

2021 Veteran Caucus Scholarships

1. Donna Jones Moritsugu Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
2. Vikki Lianne Moritsugu Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
3. SSgt Craig Ivory Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
4. Lt. Col David Gwinn Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
5. The PFC Roger W. Cummins Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
6. Grogan Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
7. Society of Army PAs/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
8. Society of Air Force PAs/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
9. Jesse Edwards Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
10. SSGT Robert V. Milner Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
11. SMSgt. Nathan L. Lipscomb, Sr. Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
12. Sgt. Frederick C. Brace Jr./ Capt. Frederick C. Brace III Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
13. Albert T. Kissel Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
14. LT Ruth Cortes Memorial/Veterans Caucus Scholarship
15. Veterans Caucus Scholarship

Board of Directors

Student Veteran Challenges to Becoming a PA (cont.)

This theme resonates greatly with those with a strong medical background in the military but may lack the civilian certifications equivalent to their capabilities and experience.

Despite the PA profession's origins rooted in the military, more and more PA programs are placing greater emphasis on meeting academic requirements. Even veterans with a strong background in medicine who are applying to PA school are on even playing grounds as someone with 2 years of medical scribing in the emergency department. Understandably this is not a simple dilemma for PA programs as ideal candidates can certainly be found from all walks of life. However, a medic with a handful of deployments under the belt treating battlefield casualties and tending to their sick teammates while stationed in remote outposts certainly warrants a greater degree of consideration. The non-recognition of military experience and education in the academic setting continues to be an evolving barrier for veterans wanting to become physician assistants.

Now let's say a veteran applicant gets accepted to PA school. How can one expect to afford to pay the tuition? As with any graduate degree program, the price tag is not for the faint of heart and we continue to see it rise annually. Based on the 2018 Statistic Report from NCCPA, the average debt that PA students can expect is \$116,733. This is not including what may have been incurred before starting PA school. Veterans have a slight advantage with the availability of the Post 9/11 GI Bill implemented in 2009, but often times, these funds are completely depleted by the time one reaches graduate school. Even more damaging is when for-profit schools exploit veteran enrollment only to reap the veteran of all their benefits and provide a useless degree that many community colleges will not even recognize. The Post 9/11 GI Bill was designed to help veterans obtain a 4-year degree. How one was to utilize it would be up to their discretion. Many veterans are not well informed enough about how far you can truly stretch your educational benefits, potentially earning not only an undergraduate degree but also using it for graduate school. Additional funding can also come from schools that participate in Yellow Ribbon funding which helps supplement tuition that cannot fully be covered by the GI Bill. Lastly, there are amazingly generous organizations that provide scholarship opportunities for veterans seeking higher levels of education.

This entire past year has truly been a testament to the longevity of our profession, a profession derived from those who have served in the military. PAs continue to work in the forefront against COVID19 and as the battle continues, we have veterans who are hoping to continue the fight through medicine. However, the ever-changing requirements to become a PA are placing down barriers for our veterans to achieve this goal. There are certainly more challenges that were not covered in this article. However, as veterans and practicing PAs, we are in the perfect position to help guide young veterans who wish to pursue a career as a PA. As mentors, we can help veterans avoid the major pitfalls that we have experienced during our own journey. We have the potential to bring in the tenacity, knowledge, and leadership that is seemingly inherited through life in the military. This is how we can serve those who have served.

Richard Tang, PA-C
Student Representation, Veterans Caucus

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President (20-21)



Pam Lucas
President-Elect (20-21)



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Director-at-Large (19-21)



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Director-at-Large (20-22)



Rod Grogan
Past President (20-21)



Richard Tang
Student Representative (20-21)



James Cannon
Director-at-Large (19-21)



Dallas Lipscomb
Director-at-Large (20-22)



"We sleep peacefully in our beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on our behalf"

George Orwell.

