



**T A P A**  
 TENNESSEE ACADEMY OF  
 PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

# PA Pulse

*The heartbeat of TAPA*

*Bridging the Future of Healthcare*

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### **From the President**

I love fall. It is my favorite time of year. Maybe I’m a little biased because my birthday is in October. Football, cooler weather, and the changing of the leaves in our beautiful state of Tennessee are things that I always look forward to. It is fitting that my favorite season also includes the time of year when we celebrate PAs. The PA profession is something that I count myself blessed to be a part of, and I am humbled and grateful to be one of you.

As PAs, the work we do is extremely important because our patients trust us with their lives. We make countless decisions on a daily basis that impact the life and health of others. We stand on our firm foundational knowledge gained by our education, and we build on that knowledge daily in our pursuit of being lifelong learners. That is why it bothers me to know that many do not appreciate what we experience to become PAs.

While some may perceive PA education to be “short”, those of us who have experienced it can attest to the long and often bumpy road that we must travel to become PAs. Our educational process is something that we wear with a badge of honor - and rightfully so.

In our profession, we only have one accrediting body and, because of that, we have standardization in our education process. As PAs we appreciate just how hard we all worked to get to where we are today. I love that I can meet a PA in any state and in any specialty and immediately feel a bond with them because I can relate to the academic rigor that they too experienced. That is something that we all share.

Unfortunately, it is not something that is widely known by the general public, the legislators who make decisions about how we practice, or even other members of the healthcare team that we work with every day. This is an area where we have a lot of potential to increase others’ awareness. If people have a better understanding of our educational process and the thoroughness associated with it, perhaps they would better understand our full capabilities.

Many of us have probably experienced times when we had to explain how we are trained and had to make corrections about false assumptions. For example, I have described to legislators the procedures we are taught, and I have even had to explain to physician colleagues that we learn human

*See President, page 2*

*Mission - TAPA’s mission is to promote accessible, quality healthcare, and to advance the education, profession and practice of physician assistants in Tennessee.*

*Vision*

*Protecting and empowering the practice of physician assistants in Tennessee.*

*President, continued from page 1*

anatomy and pharmacology in PA school (one in particular was greatly surprised by this fact). While this can be exhausting at times, it is important to inform others of our knowledge.

While there are currently around 2500 practicing PAs in the state of Tennessee, we are still vastly outnumbered by our clinician counterparts. It can sometimes be isolating when you are the only PA practicing medicine in a clinic, or hospital, or even an entire county.

I know I have experienced those scenarios and felt those feelings. In the past, I was even asked to celebrate being a PA during Nurses' Week because my employer did not want to have another celebration for just one person since I was the only PA there.

So if you didn't receive any employer recognition during PA Week, I hope you feel proud of your hard work on the healthcare team and reflect on all of the patients' lives that you affect on a daily basis. Please know that you are supported and celebrated by TAPA. Happy PA Week to us all!

Marie Patterson, PA-C, DHSc  
TAPA President

### SAVE THE DATES!

We hope to see you at a TAPA conference in 2024. Below are the dates and locations of upcoming CME conferences.

#### **Spring Fling**

April 5-6, 2024  
The Chattanooga Hotel  
Chattanooga, Tenn.

#### **FallFest**

Oct. 7-11, 2024  
Gatlinburg Convention Center  
Gatlinburg, Tenn.

*The following article was written in 2012 by TAPA's retired lobbyist and attorney John Williams. TAPA leadership asked for a reprint of this article as the information is as relevant today as it was 10 years ago, particularly in light of TAPA's work to implement OTP in Tennessee.*

## Recipe for Success (Part 1)

*By John Williams, TAPA Lobbyist and Attorney (ret.)*

In my previous articles, I have described the challenges facing the PA profession in the next few years. In my next two articles, I describe some of the steps PAs can take to meet these challenges and to keep the PA profession moving in the right direction.

It will not be easy. It will require all Tennessee PAs to invest more of their time and money in the promotion of their profession. And it will take PAs into some areas that may be new to them, such as the political arena.

Following are a few steps PAs can take to advance their profession:

**1. Join TAPA.** Every PA in Tennessee needs to join TAPA. Currently, just under 30% of the PAs licensed in Tennessee are TAPA members. This percentage is far too low.

TAPA is your voice on Capitol Hill and before state agencies and boards such as the Board of PAs and the Department of Health. The PA profession has prospered in Tennessee because of TAPA's advocacy.

TAPA provides daily assistance to PAs who have questions and concerns about their practice. TAPA helps PAs find jobs. TAPA sponsors top-notch CME programs, as well as regional dinner meetings that offer CME credit and allow PAs to network.

TAPA could not provide these services, however, without the dues paid by its members and the fees paid by PAs to attend its CME programs. PAs who choose not to join TAPA are getting a free ride at the expense of their peers. That is not fair! Katherine and I often get calls and emails from PAs who are not TAPA members. What are they thinking? How do they think TAPA is able to afford to provide assistance to them?

*Recipe, continued from page 2*

If you know a PA who does not belong to TAPA, make sure that person knows the benefits and importance of joining.

**2. Become active in TAPA and in promoting your profession.** TAPA's success depends upon an active set of officers and board of directors. In many professions, service as president or board member of their professional organization is a highly-sought honor – one which engenders intense competition among members. It is certainly true of the Tennessee Medical Association. Hopefully, it will also be true of the Tennessee Academy of Physician Associates.

There are other ways that PAs can promote and serve their profession. Two examples come to mind. Frank Warren has presided over the Tennessee PA Foundation for many years. Frank has devised ingenious ways to raise and distribute money for scholarships to worthy PA students. Stan Roberts has served as the PA representative to the national committee writing rules and policies governing healthcare practitioners who perform physical exams of truck drivers. He has encountered – and effectively combated – the same type of physician discrimination against PAs that TAPA has been fighting at the state level. Stan now lectures on this topic at numerous national and state conferences.

This type of involvement takes time out of your busy schedules. But it is immensely important to your profession. And it can be tremendously rewarding to the PAs who participate.

**3. Become involved in politics.** If you're a healthcare practitioner, it's impossible to avoid politics these days. The most watched Supreme Court case of the last decade has been the constitutional challenge to the Affordable Care Act. One of the two most important issues in this fall's Presidential and Congressional campaigns will be the future of the Affordable Care Act, now that the law has been upheld by the Supreme Court.

Those are the issues that get the most media attention. But the issues that affect PAs most directly in their daily practice are issues decided not in Washington, but in Nashville. The decision makers are the 132 individuals who have been elected to the Tennessee General Assembly – 99

Representatives and 33 Senators.

Every PA has one Representative and one Senator who represents the district in which the PA lives. Every PA needs to know who these two legislators are.

It's not hard to find out. Go to the following website: [www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us). On the right-hand side of the home page, you will see "Find My Legislator." Go to that website, type in your home address, and you will find out who represents you in the Tennessee Senate and House of Representatives. It's that simple. Do it now!

The information you will see includes photographs of the two legislators and their email addresses, so you can easily contact them. On the right-hand side of that page, you will see, under the heading "In This Section," links to "Senate Members" and "House Members." By clicking on these links and then the link for your own legislators, you can learn a lot more about them.

The next step is to get to know them. This step may seem intimidating to some PAs, but it should not be. Legislators are social animals. They love to talk with people, especially their constituents. Look for opportunities to meet them in your home community. During the months the legislature is in session (January – May), they are in Nashville Monday through Thursday, but they are at home Friday through Sunday. And during the remaining months of the year (June – December), they are at home all the time.

They often appear at community events. They are usually willing (and anxious) to visit constituents at their places of business (e.g., a clinic or doctor's office where a PA works). They eat meals, so you might want to take them to lunch or dinner. They want to learn more about their constituents' concerns.

To influence your legislator's votes on issues of concern to PAs, there is no substitute for getting to know them personally. They respond more readily to people they know. Get their cell phone number! That way, you can reach them whenever you really need to talk with them.

***TO BE CONTINUED*** (the next article will be published in the December 2023 PA Pulse)

## Donate to TAPA's Political Action Committee (PAC)

Hello to all Tennessee PAs,

I just wanted to reach out to you concerning our legislative initiative. With January just a few short months away, I feel I should reach out and ask for your support of the TAPA PAC fund. The TAPA PAC supports our legislative agenda each year as we try to maintain and improve the ability for Tennessee PAs to function to the fullest extent of their training. As you know, legislators cannot accept political donations while the legislature is in session, so that behooves us to act before January.

We are closer to obtaining OTP in Tennessee than we have ever been in the past. This coming year in January, we do not have to start over as we have done so many years in the past. We were able to freeze our efforts where they were when the legislature closed this past session. We now, for the first time I can remember, have the opportunity to pick up where we left off and forge ahead to legislative success. TAPA has targeted key legislators to help us accomplish this effort for OTP (Optimal Team Practice). This will open up many avenues that are and have been closed to PAs in past years.

What you and I have today as practicing PAs are the results of those who have gone before us. We owe it to the profession to keep the momentum going during this crucial time in medical history. Do not ever give away power in your profession. Today, we are so close to a turning point in Tennessee history for all who want to walk this wonderful journey of being a PA.

**Would you join me in making a one-time donation for this year's PAC of \$200?** Your donation will demonstrate your commitment to the PA profession and help us move toward achieving our legislative goals.

Respectfully,  
Donald A. (Don) Black, PA-C, MPAS, DFAAPA  
TAPA Political Action Committee, Chair

## 2023 TAPA PAC Contributors

(Received Jan. 1-Sept. 30, 2023)

Thank you to the many PAs who donated to TAPA's PAC this year. If you haven't yet contributed to the PAC this year, please visit [www.tnpa.com/political-action-committee](http://www.tnpa.com/political-action-committee) to

### Bridge Members

*contributing \$250+*

\*Greg Cain  
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### \*Recurring donors

### Sustaining Members

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*contributing up to \$100*

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