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Inclusion

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Thank You for Being an Essential Part of AAPM&R's Diversity and Inclusion Journey

The diversity of practice within the specialty of PM&R and our more than 10,000 Academy members provide a unique opportunity to support each other in advancing physiatry's impact through healthcare. As we move forward toward our BOLD vision for our specialty, it is more important than ever that every member play an active role in this new vision in order for the vision to become reality.

The **BOLD** Vision for Physiatry:

Physiatrists are the **essential** medical experts in value-based **evaluation, diagnosis and management** of neuromusculoskeletal and disabling conditions.

Physiatrists are **indispensable** leaders in **directing rehabilitation and recovery**, and in preventing injury and disease.

Physiatrists are **vital** in optimizing outcomes and function **early and throughout the continuum of patient care**.



“ I fully endorse the **BOLD** vision for our specialty, where we are essential medical experts who are vital early and throughout the continuum of care. To make this happen, it is essential that all members feel included and can get engaged, so that together we can make this vision a reality. I look forward to working with all of you. ”

D.J. Kennedy, MD, FAAPMR
Chair, Inclusion and Engagement Committee



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Thank You for Being an Essential Part of AAPM&R's Diversity and Inclusion Journey

2018

The AAPM&R Board of Governors understood that a strategic focus on diversity and inclusion was necessary so that every member of the Academy was included on this journey. This decision led to the 2018 release of the AAPM&R Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and adoption of a new Diversity and Inclusion statement:

As AAPM&R leads the advancement of physiatry's impact throughout healthcare, we will model inclusion and embrace diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those with whom we work and serve.

The Academy is especially committed to creating space for the difficult conversations, hearing the voices least heard, and promoting policy and initiatives that support diversity and inclusion.

Under the guidance of this statement, AAPM&R created a strategic plan with priorities in three areas:

- Top Level Commitment & Accountability
- Developing Physiatric Leaders
- Equitable Environment



2019

With these goals in mind, 2019 was a year where infrastructure was established to ensure the success of this effort.

- A new Strategic Coordinating Committee, the Inclusion and Engagement Committee, was created to develop and foster inclusion and engagement of all members.
- D.J. Kennedy, MD was selected to chair the Inclusion and Engagement Committee and serves alongside, William Jones, MD; Carol Vandenakker-Albanese, MD; Monica Verduzco-Gutierrez, MD; Carla Watson, MD; Michael Yochelson, MD; Zachary Bailowitz, MD (PHIT Liaison 2018 – 2019); Rosa Pasculli, MD, MBA (PHIT Liaison 2019 – 2020); and Jensine' Norman, MD (PHIT Liaison 2020 – 2021).
- Carla Watson, MD was selected to lead the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, whose members include Mohammad Agha, MD; Molly Fuentes, MD, MS; Julio Martinez, MD; Danielle Powell, MD; Saloni Sharma, MD; Elizabeth Varghese-Kroll, MD; Kareen Velez, MD; Robert Wilder, MD; Heidi Chen, MD (PHIT Liaison 2020 – 2021); Donald Kasinton, MD (PHIT Liaison 2018 – 2019); and Sharlene Su, MD (PHIT Liaison 2019 – 2020).



2020

AAPM&R participated in a first of its kind benchmarking survey sponsored by Association Forum and McKinley Advisors entitled the "Welcoming Environment® Benchmarking Study" to support our strategic efforts on this journey to better understand how our members view our diversity and inclusion efforts as well as identifying opportunities where we can grow. We felt it was important to be involved at the beginning level of the WE® study to form a baseline to continue to evaluate our progress on this journey.

It aimed to address such topics as the importance of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) to the association community, levels of integration of DE&I into associations (e.g., strategic plan, mission/vision, member initiatives, etc.) and awareness and comfort level with DE&I related topics within the association.

Close to 600 members participated in this study. We are currently writing up the findings for potential future publication to share with all members.

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee prioritized enhancing the way that AAPM&R collects member personal demographic information. These enhancements we made to questions related to race/ethnicity and gender identity. New questions were created to learn about members' sexual orientation identification, disability status and languages spoken. These optional questions are included in the member profile and launched as part of the 2021 membership process. The information will be used in aggregate to help the Academy develop strategies to better support members.

2020

2020 brought upon everyone an unprecedented pandemic and social unrest, resulting in an urgent need to come together like never before. To address this need, a virtual event series was created as a safe space to share experiences and increase our collective understanding of critical topics. Events in the Critical Conversations on Equity, Access, and Inclusion in PM&R, Health Care, and Society included:

- Understanding the African American Physiatrist Experience
- AAPM&R's Diversity and Inclusion Journey
- Multicultural Leadership within PM&R – Dissolving Barriers: Cultivation of Diversity from Both Sides of the Fence
- Healthcare Disparities in PMR & Beyond
- Understanding the Asian, Asian American and Pacific Islander Physiatrist Experience

During these events, members have been coming together to discuss important and difficult topics. Additionally, personal member stories from African American physiatrists were shared through a series dedicated to highlighting their experiences, interviewed by Chaitanya Konda, DO. We are appreciative of Benecia Williams, DO, MS; Jansine' Norman, MD; and Ugochi Azuikwe, DO for their willingness to share their stories.

Even with the disruption of the pandemic, volunteer leaders pressed on and developed a new Academy policy, the **Principles of Inclusion and Engagement**. These principles allow everyone, volunteer leaders and members alike, to keep diversity and inclusion in the forefront as we build and grow together as Team Physiatry.

Valuing Diverse Group Composition

- Recognizing that a diverse group that is more representative of our overall member composition can result in enhanced group outcomes.
- Volunteers can be selected as a member of a particular community to enhance diversity of thought and experiences, but they should not view their role as a member for that community. Instead, they represent the entirety of PM&R.

Mutual Respect

- Demonstrating respect for differing opinions and viewpoints.
- Cultivating a receptive space for differing opinions and viewpoints.

Talent and Skill-Based Selection for Leadership Opportunities

- Ensuring that broad criteria of diversity of experience, talent and knowledge are incorporated.
- Removing barriers to involvement to further support an equitable environment to assure that all future leaders have the opportunity to contribute where needed.

Comprehensive Collaboration

- Building community between various member constituents is essential as a physiatric member association.
- Bringing different perspectives together will enhance innovative thinking and achievement.

Planning for More Inclusive Member Engagement

Leaders of the Member Communities came together to learn from each other and develop new strategies to engage their community members. We are excited to see those strategies implemented in 2021 to support increased engagement in the Academy.

2021 AND BEYOND

There remains so much more work ahead of us, but we are on the right path.

This year, AAPM&R is being honored with the Welcoming Environment® Organization Award for our efforts to date. This honor is only due to the collective work of volunteer leaders, members and staff alike who are committed to exemplifying the core values of the Academy—stewardship, leadership, collaboration, innovation and respect for human dignity.

“As we look to the future of our specialty, it is critical that all members have a voice into this BOLD vision. I am elated to be on this journey with all of you.”

Carla Watson, MD, FAAPMR
Chair, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

As we continue on this journey, we look to engage more members, understand and learn from the unique needs of our members, and work toward a BOLD vision of the specialty together. Learn more about our D&I efforts by visiting aapmr.org/about-aapm-r/advancing-diversity-and-inclusion.

Read more about AAPM&R's health policy and advocacy efforts that support diversity and inclusion on page 6.



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