

## Taking the Lead

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The person many consider the father of rehabilitation medicine, Howard A. Rusk, MD, came to New York City after completing his term of service in the United States Air Force in World War II. In 1948, 75 years ago, he established the first university-based rehabilitation program at New York University where I now serve as department chair. During the war, he realized the immense value of exercise and treating the whole person, recognizing the ill effects of prolonged bed rest. He succeeded in returning injured service personnel to productive lives despite what were previously considered quality-of-life-ending disabilities. He applied those same principles to civilians, contributing to the field of PM&R. During his tenure at NYU, Dr. Rusk realized great success in growing his department as well as awareness of PM&R's tremendous value to people with disabilities. He achieved this through his published works and real-life demonstrations of how PM&R substantively improved the quality-of-life and immense potential of people with physical and cognitive challenges. PM&R, both inpatient and ambulatory services, realized tremendous growth over the following decades, which continued through the early times of my own career. Dr. Rusk's leadership and the efforts of many other early pioneers in PM&R laid the groundwork for our field and all physiatrists today.

The work of these early leaders cannot be described as easy. However, the current healthcare environment requires even more strenuous efforts from physiatrists to ensure our field thrives well into the future.

We face multiple challenges, from scope of practice infringements, insurance denials, insufficient reimbursement, workforce shortages and many more that impact our practice of medicine. We feel this every day in our work as we treat patients. The Academy recognized these challenges and embarked on a vision for PM&R several years ago to ensure the immense value physiatrists contribute to medicine thrives during these times of healthcare upheaval and well into the future.

Over many months, the Academy brought together literally thousands of physiatrists across the country to develop our PM&R BOLD vision:

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

Achieving this vision, which is at the core of your Academy's efforts, requires recognition of barriers we need to collectively overcome.

Leadership will be an essential component of achieving the PM&R BOLD vision, which we need from our members. It is essential for physiatrists to take the lead in conjunction with the Academy to define and secure our envisioned future. As natural leaders of diverse rehabilitation teams designed to achieve the best possible outcomes for our patients, we have the natural phenotype to take on this challenge.

But we do not need to do it in a vacuum, recognizing additional tools available through the Academy will help us lead the way. To help us ensure our medical peers, health system leadership, government officials and insurance administrators understand the vital role physiatrists play in fully achieving the Triple Aim of Medicine, the Academy developed multiple growth opportunities for our members to foster leadership skills, including:

- The Future Leaders Program (read the article on page 10).
- In-person training, toolkits and enduring webinars that focus on positioning PM&R and effectively communicating physiatrist's value to key stakeholders and decision-makers including primary care providers and health system leadership.
- Leadership sessions during the Annual Assembly and in our Online Learning Portal.



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- Medical Directorship Training Program, currently in development, with registration anticipated to launch later this year.
- Diverse volunteer opportunities to assist members in leading areas in which they are passionate. These include, but are not limited to, curriculum development, advocacy on Capitol Hill and guidance statement development.
- The Department Chairs Summit, which brings together national PM&R leaders who can effectuate local change in their healthcare system.

There will be challenges and obstacles in realizing our PM&R vision. But while leadership is an essential component, I am confident it is not a true barrier, but rather a great opportunity.

I have been fortunate in my own career to work with the Academy to collectively advance education and advocacy with colleagues across the country. The effort I gave during volunteer opportunities reaped tremendous personal dividends along with the satisfaction of helping to advance physiatry. Regardless of where you are in your career, we all have a tremendous stake in the future of PM&R. The Academy stands strong and in allegiance with our collective responsibility to strongly lead our field into a secure future; for ourselves, medicine and the people we serve.