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To reinforce this important work, the theme of the Academy's efforts for the next year will be: **Supporting the Psychiatrist, Strengthening the Specialty.** I hope you join me as we embark on this journey, as it is only with your support and efforts that we can succeed.

Supporting the Psychiatrist, Strengthening the Specialty

D.J. Kennedy, MD, FAAPMR
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Dear Illustrious Colleagues, It is with mixed emotions that I write this column. While I have great excitement regarding AAPM&R and the future endeavors of the Academy, I have also been asked to talk about my background given many of you do not know me. Like most, I find discussing my life story difficult, but I know embracing the strengths we have due to our diverse backgrounds makes us better, so here it goes. I grew up in a log cabin house that my parents built and still live in, on a dirt road in a rural county in the panhandle of Florida. My family roots run deep, as my brother and I were the sixth generation from the same county. While we didn't have much, I was blessed with loving parents. My mother, who was the family breadwinner as the high school science teacher, encouraged my intellectual curiosity and instilled a love of academics and science in me. My father taught me the value of hard work and patience, and through his teachings, we were fairly

self-sufficient off the bounty of nature. My parents encouraged us to continually grow and strive for excellence in all pursuits; while always living by the rule, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." After high school, I chose to go to Florida State University, as my goal was to be a collegiate strength and conditioning coach. I was fortunate to be able to achieve this goal and coached under Bobby Bowden at FSU through the mid- to late-1990s. However, my continual thirst for knowledge and desire for continued personal growth eventually led me to leave coaching and enroll in medical school. When I graduated from medical school, I became the first in my family to have a terminal degree. However, my brother now has a PhD in Ecology and Evolution, and teaches biology at the University of New Mexico. While I think my parents would love for us to be closer to home, and raise the seventh generation of Kennedys in rural Florida, I know my science-teacher-mother beams at being able to call her sons "The Doctors."

I was fortunate enough in medical school to be blessed with a phenomenal mentor, Jim Atchison DO, FAAPMR, who I am grateful to for introducing and guiding me into PM&R. I sought out a PM&R residency that was the right fit for me, which I found beyond belief at the University of Washington in Seattle. I had the best teachers and co-residents I could imagine. After my residency, I was lucky enough to complete my training as a Sports and Spine Fellow at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab in Chicago. As an attending, my first job was in Florida, before moving to California to join the PM&R program at Stanford University. Since 2018, I have been the chair of PM&R at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, where I have the privilege of working with some of the best colleagues I could imagine. In fact, throughout my training and career, I have been blessed with so many lifelong friends, and more mentors than I could possibly mention. I am also happily married to the love of my life, Lindsey; and am blessed with two daughters, Arianna Rose (8) and Amelia (3), who both definitely keep me on my toes.

While I find talking about my background somewhat challenging, I do not find any difficulty in extolling the virtues of PM&R, AAPM&R and where the Academy is heading. Through strategic planning, the Academy is developing outcome-oriented goals that will represent success for the Academy.

These include:

- ⊕ Increasing awareness and value among key stakeholders of the essential and transformative role of PM&R physicians in improving healthcare outcomes.
- ⊕ Cultivating a diverse and vibrant community of PM&R physicians who are unified in their connection to PM&R and consider membership in AAPM&R to be essential to advancing their careers and the specialty.
- ⊕ Vigorously advocating for the well-being of PM&R physicians as they provide optimal care for their patients.
- ⊕ Supporting and guiding PM&R physicians in their practices for optimal success in healthcare transformations.
- ⊕ Ensuring AAPM&R has the organizational capacity, resources and prominence to achieve its vision of advancing PM&R physicians and the specialty of PM&R.

While I believe these goals are key to advancing the field of PM&R, I also know that to achieve these goals, the Academy must be **deeply committed** to the **individual PM&R physician** and your changing needs for education, well-being and community. Over the coming months, I will use this column to explain what the Academy is doing to support you, the individual physiatrist, and our entire PM&R specialty.

Some examples of how the Academy is supporting us include:

- ⊕ The new PM&R Awareness Ambassadors Program, which recognizes AAPM&R members who have positioned PM&R through media, presentations to their communities, health systems or other specialties. If you are speaking with reporters about PM&R, delivering presentations about the value of the specialty, or something else related, we want to recognize you! Learn more at aapmr.org/ambassadors.

- ⊕ The PM&R Awareness Ambassadors Program will then feed into the launch of our AAPM&R Speakers Bureau, which will select and support PM&R champions who will continue our positive trajectory of much needed brand awareness of the specialty.

- ⊕ The Academy has published 230+ articles across 120+ national media outlets in the last two years. This helps raise our brand awareness, and shows the essential nature of what we do.

- ⊕ A new Virtual Medical Directorship Program (launching in early 2024), which will cover several key topics that are crucial for effective medical directors, including leading change, understanding roles and governing structures, organizational behavior, and more.

- ⊕ As the primary medical society for PM&R, AAPM&R continually fights for you as a PM&R physician. We are actively fighting to remove prior authorization struggles, arguing against fee cuts and defending our unique and specialized training from encroachment. To find out more and join in the fight, please visit aapmr.org/priorities.

- ⊕ The Academy has an advisory work group focused on PM&R's ability to serve as head team physicians for the NBA. We also have a Positioning PM&R in Sports Medicine Workgroup, who are actively working to increase the understanding and value of what PM&R physicians do in sports medicine and create a long-term plan to influence key stakeholders.

- ⊕ Providing data to demonstrate your value and improve your care through the AAPM&R Registry.

These are just a few of the many activities that AAPM&R is actively working on to make our specialty stronger. As I stated above, without the success of individual physiatrists, the specialty cannot thrive.

To reinforce this important work, the theme of the Academy's efforts for the next year will be: **Supporting the Physiatrist, Strengthening the Specialty**. I hope you join me as we embark on this journey, as it is only with your support and efforts that we can succeed.

If you have not already done so, please play a vital role in influencing your career and the future of the specialty by **renewing your 2024 AAPM&R membership by December 31, 2023**. I look forward to our journey, and I am thrilled for you to be a part of it.



Academy in Action

AAPM&R is Defending the Role of Physiatrists Against Encroachment from Non-PM&R Physicians and Non-Physicians

- In response to a draft coverage policy proposal that recommended expanding the scope of practice for non-physician providers for intraoperative neurophysiological monitoring services, we submitted a joint statement with the American Association of Neuromuscular & Electrodiagnostic Medicine (AANEM) affirming the necessity of physician supervision for these medical services.



Academy in Action

AAPM&R is Fighting Against PM&R Physician Fee Cuts and For Improved Payment

- In collaboration with the Multi-Specialty Pain Workgroup, AAPM&R advocated for the Washington State Health Care Authority to reverse its position of non-coverage for spinal cord stimulation for pain management.