

Epilogue:

The Future of the Army Physician Assistant

The Army Physician Assistant (PA) profession was established for a noble purpose—to provide more accessible health care for soldiers in a turbulent world. Today, PAs have eclipsed that purpose, and are advancing medicine in ways never before envisioned. PAs serve as legislators, health system CEOs, hospital commanders, city officials, medico-legal experts, professors, education system leaders, and advisors to heads of state. The future of the profession is in adapting to an ever-changing health care industry.

The vision for the Army PA profession is to reinforce the spirit of innovation and performance in medical and readiness systems embodied by PAs to improve the deployability and survivability of our soldiers. PAs have too long been relegated to an obsolete force structure that does not encourage professional growth or validate the great breadth and depth of capability and experience our PAs bring to Army Medicine and commanders. Great opportunities have opened for PAs to collaborate and lead at all levels of Army Medicine. We must bolster Army Medicine by mentoring outstanding PAs to provide leadership and expertise throughout the Army and the Defense Health Agency. With great opportunity also comes great responsibility, and we must recognize that responsible mentorship and enforcement of quality and professional standards must be reinforced wherever PAs are posted. Army PA's training and credentialing must prepare and support them for the inevitable autonomy necessitated by the dispersed and multi-domain nature of current and future deployments. That autonomy must always be tempered with adherence to standards of care, scope of practice, self-restraint, and consultation to ensure PAs and Combat Medics have robust capabilities that meet the needs of commanders.

PAs serve as the face of Army Medicine. Together with Combat Medics, PAs are many times the first professional medical officers that Soldiers seek for medical readiness and care. The PA profession offers an avenue for outstanding combat medics and soldiers to become PAs, and we must always improve pathways to recruit Medics to the Interservice PA Program (IPAP) to retain the “From the Line, For the Line” character of the Army PA. As a product of that pathway, I charge all Army PAs to seek out excellent candidates for IPAP and direct commissioning,

and to facilitate their preparation to build a force of PAs with the depth of operational experience the Army, Department of Defense, and the world need for the future.

The *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook*, First Edition, collated the writings of the thought leaders of the Army PA profession. Only 2 years later, Army Medicine and the world have changed immensely. Because of all who have contributed to the first edition, we now have a snapshot in time of the opinions, challenges, and successes of those authors. Now, as the Military Health System continues to reform at a blistering pace along with the US civilian health system, current PA leaders continue to develop, lead, and share their hearts and opinions in this new addition. You are the real engine behind our positive energy! Thanks to all of you who enhance the PA profession and help others in the military and civilian communities. This publication is a true testament to all who have contributed and shared.

To all the individuals I have had the opportunity to serve with, be led by, or watch their leadership from afar, I want to say thank you for being the inspiration and foundation for the second edition of the *US Army Physician Assistant Handbook*. Without the experiences and support from peers and our teams, which touch on every aspect of military and civilian medicine, this book would not exist. You have given us all the opportunity to be surrounded by a great group of individuals. To be a leader among other great leaders is an honor. Thank you and special acknowledgements to COL Amy Jackson and LTC Amelia Duran-Stanton for their leadership, tenacity, and sustained unconditional support for the second edition of the *Physician Assistant Handbook*.

The associated dynamics of DOD and the recent organizational changes have presented many opportunities. The readiness growth and development experience is both internally challenging and rewarding as we continue to grow in support of our forces. I especially want to thank the individuals who helped make this happen and mentor those who will publish the next editions.

Colonel David Hamilton
The 9th Army Physician Assistant Consultant
to the Army Surgeon General