

## **The American Registry of Physicians' Associates Forerunner of the Association of Physician Assistant Programs**

**By Reginald D. Carter, PhD, PA and Carl E. Fasser, PA-C**

The old adage “success breeds success” describes the rapid proliferation of all types of “physician assistant” programs between 1965 and 1970. This unwieldy growth occurred prior to the development of accreditation standards in 1971 and national certification requirements in 1973. The curriculums for these “generalist” and “specialist” programs ranged in length from a few weeks to over four years, depending on the background of the student and on the role the “new health practitioner” was to play. Programs were located in medical schools, schools of allied health professions, universities, colleges, junior colleges, hospitals, clinics and Federal facilities. In 1970 the Board of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences classified physician assistants as Type A, B and C according to their degree of specialization, level of clinical decision-making (judgment) and length of training. Several of the Type A university-based programs, decided that they needed to form an organization to recognize the higher level of education and achievement of their graduates and to provide employing physicians some standard assurance of the graduates’ capabilities.



**American Registry of Physicians'  
Associates Patented Insignia**

The American Registry of Physicians' Associates was incorporated in North Carolina on May 26, 1970. The Articles were signed by Robinson O. Everett, Martha D. Ballenger and D. Robert Howard. The initial Board of Directors included Robert Ewer, M.D, University of Texas, Galveston, TX; D. Robert Howard, MD, Duke University and Leland Powers, MD, Bowman Gray School of Medicine. The purpose of the Registry was to encourage the training and to promote and regulate the activities of Physicians' Associate by determining their competence through examinations and investigative studies. It would grant and issue certificates to graduates of approved educational and training programs and to others who demonstrated by examination that they possessed the background and experience to perform satisfactorily as graduates of approved programs. Duke University and several other programs had changed their name from “assistant” to “associate” to distinguish their programs from the Type B and C programs and the term associate became embedded into the newly incorporated organization’s name.

By-laws were adopted, officers were elected, and other university-based programs soon joined the Registry. Graduates of these programs were eligible to apply to the Registry and be certified as “Registered Physician Associates.” Once registered, they were encouraged to place R.P.A. after their name and wear a lapel pin and patch with the Registry’s patented insignia on it and display a signed certificate from the Registry in their offices. From May 1970 until April 1972, Howard served as the Registry’s first appointed and then elected president until this position was assumed by Dr. Alfred Sadler, Yale University. Powers served as secretary/treasurer until Ms. Susanne Greenberg, Northeastern University, assumed this role, keeping minutes and handling the organization’s finances. Although a good focal point for exchange of ideas, the Registry did not meet the educators’ broader academic needs. So at the Fourth Duke Conference held in Durham,

NC in April 1972, they decided to form an Association of Physician Assistant Programs. The Registry's officers would become the Association's officers for the first year. Registry president, Alfred Sadler and other board members were asked to draft by-laws to present at the next meeting.



**Lapel Pin**



**Patch**

The American Registry of Physicians' Associates Board of Directors' met on September 15, 1972 at the Hilton Inn (airport), Atlanta, GA. At this meeting a formal vote was taken to "form a new umbrella association" to be known as the Association of Physician Assistant Programs and to continue the registration function of the Registry as a subsidiary organization. The first combined meeting of the Registry and Association was held on November 10, 1972 at the Cloyd Heck Marvin Student Center, George Washington University, Washington, DC. The Association by-Laws were "discussed page by page, with suggestions made, voted on and finally approved," and officers elected to complete the five member executive committee: President-Elect - Tom Piemme, Vice President - Chuck Mullican, and Member-at-Large (since there was no past president) - Bill Stanhope. Fred Sadler and Suzanne Greenberg retained their former Registry positions and became president and secretary/treasurer of the Association.

The Registry remained a subsidiary of the Association of Physician Assistant Programs for only one year. At a meeting held in Washington, DC on November 7, 1973, the Association's second president, Dr. Thomas Piemme, suggested that the Registry be turned over to the American Academy of Physician's Associates so that professional PAs could register practicing PAs. By divesting itself of the Registry, the Association was in a much better position to gain tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service. A meeting of the Registry was held following the Association meeting and the Registry was formally transferred to the Academy. William Stanhope was elected president, Steven Turnipseed - secretary, Jeffery Heinrich - treasurer, and Gail Spears - member-at-large. Along with the Association and Academy, the Registry appeared as a cosponsor on the programs distributed at the first and second National Conference on New Health Practitioners held in 1973 in Wichita Falls, TX and in 1974 in New Orleans, LA. With the administration of a national certifying examination for physician assistants in 1973 and the development of the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, which became fully operational in 1975, the need for the Registry disappeared and the organization was liquidated by the Academy soon thereafter. At its peak, the Registry included 12 member programs and had registered over 125 graduates of these programs as "Registered Physicians' Associates."

[Links to Archived Images of Supporting Documents](#)

## Archived Document Images:

### [New Members of the Physician's Health Team: Physician's Assistants, Report, 13 May 1970. \(ID 4\)](#)

*This Ad Hoc Panel on New Members of the Physician's Health Team, Board of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences report classified physician assistants according to the degree of specialization, level of clinical decision-making (judgment) and length of training. These types "are distinguished primarily by the nature of the service each is best equipped to render by virtue of the depth and breadth of their medical knowledge and experience." Accordingly, PAs are classified as Type A, Type B and Type C assistants.*

### [Articles of Incorporation of The American Registry of Physicians' Associates, Inc., 26 May 1970. \(ID 38\)](#)

*These Articles of Incorporation of the American Registry of Physicians' Associates, were signed by Robinson O. Everett, Martha D. Ballenger and D. Robert Howard on May 26, 1970. The initial Board of Directors included Robert Ewer, M.D, University of Texas, Galveston, TX; D. Robert Howard, MD, Duke University and Leland Powers, MD, Bowman Gray School of Medicine*

### [The American Registry of Physicians' Associates, Inc. By-Laws, August 1970. \(ID 37\)](#)

*This is the By-laws of the American Registry of Physician's Associates incorporated in NC in May 1970. The purpose of the Registry was to encourage the training and to promote and regulate the activities of Physicians' Associates by determining the competence of Physicians' Associates through examinations and investigative studies, to grant and issue certificates to graduates of approved educational and training program and to others who demonstrate by examination that they possess a background and experience to perform satisfactorily as graduates of approved programs. The curriculum "should require 2 academic or more years to complete."*

### [Tentative Schedule for Advisory Council Meeting \[Duke PA Program\], Correspondence, Howard to Advisory Council, 31 July 1970. \(ID 212\)](#)

*This memorandum proposes tentative agenda for the September 1970 meeting. Topics to be discussed included a report on the legal study and proposed legislation, a summary of national efforts on evaluation, a report on the American Registry of Physicians' Associates, the Civil Service Classifications for PAs - pros and cons, the third Duke Conference to be held on November 12 and 13, and other peripheral issues such as professional liability insurance, third party payments, grants and funding, and development of baccalaureate degree option. The agenda reflects the variety issues faced by the Duke PA Program in the 1970s.*

### [Physician's Assistant Program Title \[at Duke University\], Correspondence, Howard to Bulger, 10 December 1970. \(ID 258\)](#)

*In this letter to Drs. Bulger, Kinney and Anlyan at Duke University, Dr. Robert Howard proposes to change the name of the Duke PA Program from "assistant" to "associate" to "differentiate the professional type of physician's assistants we are training here at Duke." He states this is in keeping with the guidelines of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Registry of Physicians' Associates. It was his understanding that other university-based Type A PA educational programs were making a similar change in title.*

### [The American Registry of Physicians' Associates: Trademark, 10 February 1971. \(ID 44\)](#)

*Drawing of insignia accompanying letter and application sent to the Commissioner of Patents, Washington, DC requesting registration of the mark "Registered Physicians' Associate" and the appropriate insignia. (Fee was \$35)*

[Registration of the Trade Mark "Registered Physicians' Associate," Correspondence, Howard to the Commissioner of Patents, 18 March 1971. \(ID 43\)](#)

*Cover letter sent to the Commissioner of Patents, Washington, DC requesting registration of the mark "Registered Physicians' Associate" and the appropriate insignia. (Fee was \$35)*

[Nomenclature and the use of the terms "physician's assistant" and "physician's associate", Correspondence, Howard to Dr. Myers, 3 November 1971.\(ID 63\)](#)

*This letter from Robert Howard, Director Duke University PA Program, to Ira Myers, Secretary of the Alabama Board of Medical Examiners, concerns the nomenclature and the use of the terms "physician's assistant" and "physician's associate. Howard describes evolution of nomenclature used for PAs and why it was necessary to use term associate to distinguish "Type A assistants" from other less qualified assistants. He mentions the formation of the American Registry of Physicians' Associates to "provide a mechanism for accrediting Type A PA programs and register those who have either graduated from Type A programs or those, who, by education and experience, are able to function in this capacity."*

[Meeting \[of the\] American Registry of Physicians' Associates : Agenda, 15 September 1972. \(ID 30\)](#)

*The agenda for the American Registry of Physicians' Associates Board of Directors' meeting held on September 15, 1972, at the Hilton Inn (airport), Atlanta, GA.*

[Board of Directors \[of the\] The American Registry of Physicians' Associates, Minutes, 19 September 1972. \(ID 29\)](#)

*Minutes from the American Registry of Physicians' Associates Board of Directors' meeting held on September 15, 1972 at the Hilton Inn (airport), Atlanta, GA. At this meeting a formal vote was taken to "form a new umbrella association" to be known as the Association of Physician Assistant Programs and to continue the registration function of the Registry as a subsidiary organization.*

[Transition of American Registry of Physicians' Associates to the Association of Physician Assistant Programs, Correspondence, Greenberg to Registry Members, 25 September 1972. \(ID 28\)](#)

*Cover letter from Suzanne Greenberg, Secretary-Treasurer of the American Registry of Physicians' Associates with accompanying minutes of the September 15, 1972, Board of Director's meeting in which a vote was taken to formally establish a new umbrella organization to be known as the Association of Physician Assistant Programs. Programs were asked to pay a \$100 annual fee to belong to the Association.*

[The Association of Physician Assistant Programs, Minutes, 10 November 1972. \(ID 33\)](#)

*Minutes of the first meeting of the Association of Physician Assistant Programs held November 10, 1972 at the Cloyd Heck Marvin Student Center, George Washington University, Washington, DC. The By-Laws were "discussed page by page, with suggestions made, voted on and finally approved." Plans were made for the "5th Annual Congress" i.e., the first national conference held at Wichita Falls, TX and officers elected to complete the five member executive committee: President-Elect - Tom Piemme, Vice President - Chuck Mullican, and Member of the executive committee (since no past president) - Bill Stanhope. Fred Sadler was acting president at the time and Sue Greenberg continued as secretary/treasurer.*

[The Association of Physician Assistant Programs, Draft Minutes, 7 November 1973. \(ID 161\)](#)

*Draft minutes of the semi-annual meeting of the Association of Physician Assistant Programs held on November 7, 1973 in Washington, DC. At this meeting it was decided to turn the American Registry of Physician Associates over to the American Academy of Physician's Assistants. A list of individuals attending the meeting is attached to minutes as well as brief minutes of meeting of the American Registry of Physician's Associates - William Stanhope was elected president.*

[The American Registry of Physicians' Associates: Artifact \[Patch\], 21 August 1971. \(PAHx, Carl E. Fasser Collection\)](#)

*This patch displaying the insignia of the American Registry of Physicians' Associates was to be worn on the white coat of physician's associates (assistants) approved and registered by the organization that was incorporated in May 1970.*

[The American Registry of Physicians' Associates: Artifact \[Lapel Pin\], 21 August 1971. \(PAHx, Carl E. Fasser Collection\)](#)

*This lapel pin displaying the insignia of the American Registry of Physicians' Associates was to be worn by physician's associates (assistants) approved and registered by the organization that was incorporated in May 1970.*

[The American Registry of Physicians' Associates: Artifact \[Certificate\], 21 August 1971. \(PAHx, Carl E. Fasser Collection\)](#)

*This certificate was issued to Carl E. Fasser on August 21, 1971 by the American Registry of Physicians' Associates. Mr. Fasser was duly recognized as a physician's associate in medicine. Individuals could apply as well for registration in surgery and other specialties. By being registered, Mr. Fasser was entitled to use the anonym R.P.A. (i.e., Registered Physician's Associate) after his name.*

[The American Registry of Physicians' Associates: Artifact \[Insignia\], 1970. \(PAHx Archival Collection\)](#)

*This insignia and logo was patented in 1971 by the American Registry of Physicians' Associates and used on stationary and imprinted on patches and lapel pins to be worn by PAs who were registered by the organization.*