

University of Utah's Physician Assistant Program celebrates profession's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

On Oct. 3, the University of Utah's Physician Assistant Program faculty and staff gathered with a few leading pioneers in the Physician Assistant (PA) world at the Swaner Forum in Utah's National History Museum to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PA profession.

"I'm excited to be looking back on the 50 years of the profession and almost 50 years of the program here at the university," said [Don Pedersen](#), professor emeritus of the Department of Family and Preventative Medicine.

In addition to celebrating with a variety of influencers and members of the PA field, the celebration hosted a banner display that has traveled to the Huntsman Cancer Institute, Primary Children's Hospital, Eccles Health Sciences Library, and the University of Utah Hospital. The display consisted of six banners representing a different parts of the PA profession, its history, and its important and contributing factors around the world.

The PA profession began when Dr. Eugene Stead of Duke University Medical Center compiled a class of U.S Navy Corpsman in 1965 and taught them content based on the quick and useful knowledge that was taught to medical staff during World War II. This began to allow for more assistance and help coming from non-medical personnel.

[Karen Mulitalo](#), program director and interim division chief of the Division of Physician Assistant Studies, opened the program with words of thanks and love for the PA profession. She was then followed by [Santosh Reddy](#), associate professor of Internal Medicine.

Reddy began the program by sharing some of his experiences and thoughts regarding the PA profession and the love he has for his career. [Ruth Ballweg](#), professor emeritus from the University of Washington School of Medicine, and PA historian, followed Reddy by taking the time to share important details of the beginning of the PA profession.

"Most people focus on Duke and how the profession started there, but there is more to the story," Ballweg said.

She continued to tell the audience of Richard "Dick" Smith, a widely known professor who helped establish the profession and who started one of the first PA programs at the University of Washington.

[Roderick S. Hooker](#), adjunct professor of health policy from Northern Arizona University, a leading pioneer in the PA sphere, followed Ballweg by speaking of medical professional statistics. He showed the rates of doctors per people worldwide and how people across the world have need for the growing profession.

"It is a great day to be a PA and an observer," Hooker said.

Pedersen then took the time to not only praise the PA profession, but acknowledge and applaud the University of Utah's PA program. From its start in a small, rundown, red brick building on the grounds of Fort Douglas, Pedersen accounted how the PA program has grown and improved and has made a significant impact on lives of many.

Mulitalo concluded the program by sharing her experiences with the program. She then introduced a video compilation the department had been working on showing the love and experiences students and faculty have had working in the program and practicing.

The PA program at the University of Utah will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> year in 2020, which many are looking forward to. While the profession has improved greatly over the past 50 years, everyone is aware of and excited for the work to come.

“There is still a lot of work to do and we are looking forward to the future,” Ballweg said.

For more information regarding the PA program and the University of Utah and its expansion, visit <http://medicine.utah.edu/dfpm/physician-assistant-studies/>.

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