Karen Barr, MD

Tell members a little bit about yourself.

Your Practice

I am a professor of PM&R at the University of Pittsburgh. A major focus of my career has been teaching and mentoring medical students, residents, fellows and junior faculty.

Clinically, I focus on infusing PM&R into the care of heart and lung transplant patients, starting in the prehabilitation phase and spanning the continuum of care to long-term health and function. A bridge between this work and my work in our spine health clinic for patients with complex spine issues is the use of lifestyle medicine principles that inform my PM&R approach. I also remain active in the electrodiagnostics clinic.

Your Life Outside of Work

Outside of work, my husband is an anesthesiologist, and we have two sons in college. We enjoy spending time together, especially in nature. I like to hike, run and create, especially through painting, writing and cooking.

What accomplishments/honors are you particularly proud of that you would like to share with members?

Mentoring other clinician educators on how to be successful at a research-intensive university and how to balance the demands of life in and outside of work gives me great professional satisfaction. With this in mind, I started our department's peer mentoring program and a medical education track for our residents and fellows who plan to pursue careers as clinician educators.

I am also an associate program director of the PM&R Residency Program at Pitt and was formerly a program director at the University of Washington. Through AAPM&R, I've been able to keep in touch with many doctors I helped teach and mentor, and it has been wonderful to see their accomplishments.

My biggest honor is being the mother of my two boys, who are kind, hardworking and forging their own paths to contribute to the world. I am proud of navigating the challenges of raising kids while pursuing professional goals.

What have you advanced in your local community outside of or in conjunction with your medical practice?

Ever since I was a child growing up in Cleveland, I was aware that the University of Pittsburgh was a leading innovator in organ transplantation. That was one reason I was so thrilled to begin the prehabilitation clinic for heart and lung transplant candidates at UPMC.

It has been very rewarding to work with these patients and teams and to spread the word nationally about the key role that PM&R plays in prehabilitation before major surgeries to improve access to care and outcomes.

What special skills or unique attributes do you bring to the Board of Governors?

I have worked in different regions of the country and in a wide range of clinical and administrative roles. This, combined with my creative spirit, drives me to explore common themes and what is at the core.

Like my fellow Board members, I am passionate about the value that PM&R brings to our patients and healthcare systems.

What is a current or future challenge to the Academy or the specialty that you look forward to addressing as a Board Member?

This is a very challenging time to be a physician. Staying true to our spiritual and professional values in the midst of corporate pressures can be difficult. These are choppy waters, both financially and morally, and it will take wisdom, boldness and community to navigate through them as a field.