

D.J. Kennedy, MD, FAAPMR
Chair, Inclusion and Engagement Committee

Tell members a little bit about yourself.

Your Practice and Your Life Outside of Work

I grew up in a log cabin house that my parents built (and still live in), off a dirt road in the panhandle of Florida. Since leaving home, my education and jobs have resulted in me moving around the country quite a bit. I did my internship in New Orleans at Tulane, my PM&R residency in Seattle at the University of Washington, and my fellowship in Spine and Sports Chicago at the former Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago now Shirley Ryan Ability Lab.

My first job was in Florida, then I transitioned to Stanford University in California, where I also served as the residency program director. I have now lived in Nashville since 2018, where I serve as the Chair of the Department of PM&R at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. I am a dual board (PM&R and Sports Medicine) certified physician, and my clinical and academic practice has evolved over time to focus mainly on interventional and non-interventional spine care. Outside of work, I enjoy outdoor activities and anything that allows me to spend time with my family. My wife is my rock, and enables all my success. I am trying to raise my two daughters (ages six and almost one) to be strong enough to do whatever they want to in life.

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

Ever since I treated a patient as a senior resident who was paralyzed while receiving an epidural steroid injection, I have strived to study the efficacy and safety of spine procedures. I also have tried to educate practitioners both nationally and internationally on the methods to prevent complications associated with these procedures. To date, I have published well over 200 peer-reviewed manuscripts, chapters, posters, etc. I have also given more than 150 national and international talks including keynote lectures in Austria, England, South Korea, Thailand, and Australia.

I have won numerous research awards, including the Henry Farfan Award for outstanding contributions in spine-related basic science research through the North American Spine Society (NASS). I have served as a Senior Editor for *PM&R*, on the Editorial Board for *Pain Medicine*, and as a Deputy Editor for *The Spine Journal*. In addition to research, I have a passion for teaching. I have served as a residency program director at two institutions, and an interventional spine fellowship director as well. I have won teaching awards at both the University of Florida and Stanford University. I am so proud of my trainees, and honored that since the awards inception in 2012, one of my trainees has won the annual best fellow or best resident research award at the Spine Intervention Society (SIS) an astounding six times.

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

Nashville and the state of Tennessee in general have not been historically strong hubs for PM&R. In fact, the Department of PM&R at Vanderbilt University Medical Center was not founded until 2014, and the first class of four residents graduated in 2019. Unfortunately, Vanderbilt is currently the only PM&R residency program in the entire state. That was one of the many reasons I was excited about moving to the area and help grow the Department of PM&R. Since arriving, my goal has been to grow a national

powerhouse of a PM&R program, which helps drive PM&R nationally, while also enhancing much-needed patient care in the local community. Over the last two years, we have hired new physicians to the state of Tennessee in multiple areas including: pediatrics, sports, spinal cord injury, brain injury, cancer rehabilitation, spine, and pain, not to mention several faculty focused on research and psychology services. We have done this with an intentional focus on diversity, adding top tier faculty from broad backgrounds covering numerous clinical areas, all while enhancing our departmental diversity in both gender and race. I believe this is essential to truly serving the community we treat.

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

I bring several useful traits and skills to the Board of Governors. First, is an unbridled passion for PM&R and advancing our field. Second, is a long history of service to the Academy. I served first as a Member-at-Large and then Chair of Maintenance of Certification steps 3&4 on the Medical Education Committee from 2010-2015. I have been on the Board of Governors since 2015, first as a Member-at-Large and most recently as the Chair of the Inclusion and Engagement Strategic Coordinating Committee. Over the years, I have done numerous other activities within AAPM&R including: Steering Committee for the AAPM&R Registry, AAPM&R representative to the U.S. Bone and Joint Initiative on Chronic Osteoarthritis Management, Medical Advisory Group for PM&R Knowledge Now® curriculum, evidence-based medicine curriculum development, speaking to the ACGME regarding the need to be allowed to have multiple pain fellowships at a single institution, and contributing to the graduate medical education summit planning commission. This diverse background demonstrates both a commitment to the Academy, but also having been involved with so many facets of the organization that I have sufficient background experience and institutional knowledge to help guide the organization as the board directs. I believe this involvement shows I have a level of clear and logical thought, combined with an ability to both think of novel ideas while also being able to see them to fruition.

Third, I also bring a strong leadership background at numerous levels across multiple organizations. Guiding a medical specialty, a large organization, or any group of high achievers requires sufficient leadership skills to accomplish the task which I have recurrently demonstrated. Fourth, is an ability to comfortably speak on difficult topics to small and large groups either in-person or via electronic methods. Decisions made at a board level are often multi-factorial and generally require those that can articulate complex points in a coherent manner so that our members understand the rational and thought processes behind these complex decisions. Lastly, my diverse background (having lived in numerous places, being a clinically-active physician who is also heavily involved in spine research, education and leadership) helps me serve as a voice for all of my fellow PM&R doctors. From both in and out of the Academy I strive to advance our field, and be a voice for PM&R.

What do you most look forward to in your service on the Board?

I love thinking about the future of our field, and methods to advance PM&R for the benefit of all. AAPM&R is vested in growing PM&R, and anything I can do to contribute to that goal is time well-spent. Recently, I have been honored to chair the Inclusion and Engagement (I&E) Strategic Planning Committee. I could not be prouder of the work this group has done, especially during a trying time nationally due to systemic racism, inequality, and a global pandemic. I firmly believe that the work done by the I&E committee will be essential to engaging all PM&R physicians (both members and non-members), so that together we can advance our field to a stronger place. While the work is not done, I very much look forward to continuing advancing our field through the AAPM&R.

What have we not asked you that you think members should know about you?

I am vested in our specialty and society not just succeeding but thriving. My goal is to continue to advance PM&R and AAPM&R through hard work, an intentional focus on achieving greatness, and a dedicated passion to collaboration. I feel privileged and humbled to have the opportunity to contribute to the process, and look forward to the future of PM&R and the Academy.