innovators & influencers™ honorees

aapm&r

Each year, AAPM&R is proud to feature the amazing work of our early- and mid-career members and the impact they are making in the field of PM&R.

Our Innovators & Influencers Honorees are Academy members, PGY3 through 15 years post-residency, who have accomplished innovative or influential work within the specialty of PM&R.

Categories include but are not limited to:

- Clinical Innovation
- Practice Innovation
- Specialty Advocacy
- Patient Advocacy
- National Education
- National Service
- Specialty Awareness/Expansion
- Mentorship
- Community Programming/Involvement
- Patient Education

In our third year, we are honoring 27 physiatrists who were selected by the Innovators & Influencers Honorees Application Review Workgroup and approved by the Inclusion & Engagement Committee.

Congratulations to our 2026 Innovators & Influencers Honorees!

Suzanne Abou-Diab, MD
Pain Medicine Fellow
Loma Linda California

Dr. Abou-Diab is currently at the Loma Linda California Pain Fellowship Program. She recently authored a children's book that addresses the experiences of pediatric traumatic amputees through two children who navigate limb loss together. This work represents an innovative intersection of medical expertise and narrative medicine, filling a critical void in literature for children facing limb difference. This book serves as both a therapeutic tool and an educational resource for an underserved population. The narrative authentically portrays the medical and psychological challenges these children face—phantom limb pain, functional adaptation, mobility barriers, prosthetic adjustment—while embedding evidence-based coping strategies within an engaging story. The book itself addresses a crisis affecting thousands of pediatric amputees in Gaza, representing the largest cohort of pediatric traumatic amputees in modern history. It provides a culturally-sensitive, medically-accurate resource for an underserved population experiencing conflict-related trauma. International rehabilitation organizations, humanitarian groups and medical professionals working in conflict zones now have a tool that acknowledges both the medical and psychosocial dimensions of pediatric limb loss. The book also incorporates themes of mutual empowerment and faith-based resilience, recognizing that healing occurs not in isolation but through community and connection. The narrative demonstrates how children can become advocates for one another by building confidence through shared experience. It promotes the understanding that success after limb loss isn't about returning to "normal" but about redefining what success means—a message central to PM&R philosophy.

Alpha Anders, MD, FAAPMR
Pain Management Physician
St. Luke's Pain Management

Dr. Anders has been an active member of AAPM&R for many years. This began when he was a PGY-2 resident on the PHiT Council Board where he served as a liaison to the Medical Education Committee and contributed to the development of resident education

resources, resident bootcamps and digital learning initiatives to enhance trainee engagement and curricular innovation. In his various roles on the PHiT Council Board, he was able to develop several sessions for the Annual Assembly including "Controversies in Rehab," "Niche Rehab" and "Financials in Rehab." Dr. Anders uses his previously learned skills as a former middle school teacher to create educational content that connects with in-training members. As the 2023-2024 PHiT Council Board President, he led a pivotal effort to formally integrate medical students into AAPM&R's leadership structure. This included the creation of the Medical Student Ambassador Program and the addition of two permanent medical student roles on the PHiT Council Board. He also served as a resident liaison to the African American Physiatrists Member Community where he worked with the communities' students and resident members to encourage involvement in the specialty.

Justin Bishop, MD, MBA, MS, FAAPMR
Physiatrist
Physical Medicine Consultants

Dr. Bishop has dedicated his career to advancing patient care, supporting physicians and elevating the field of PM&R. Beginning in medical school, he engaged in several organizations such as the TMA, AMA, AMPAC, AAMC and AAPM&R where he began his various committee work which later led to a number of board positions in these organizations. These experiences strengthened his communication, leadership and networking skills, which allowed him to champion rehabilitation-focused resolutions at both state and national levels during medical school and then residency. Following residency, Dr. Bishop continued his service with AAPM&R, TMA and DCMS (on a local level) and within the past few years has enjoyed spreading the word about PM&R. From lobbying on the hill to giving lectures non-PM&R residents (and physicians), he strives to inform and educate on the importance of PM&R and its utility. He has contributed to public education on TBI awareness through statewide patient initiatives and working as the Brain Injury Consultant for the Texas Workforce Commission. Currently within AAPM&R, Dr. Bishop serves as the chair for the State Advocacy Committee and is a member of the Health Policy & Legislation Committee. Overall, he values teaching, fostering, improving rehabilitation care and finds the greatest fulfillment in witnessing its direct impact on patients and the medical community.

Robynne Braun, MD, PhD, FAAPMR
Associate Professor and Director of the Brain Rehab and Recovery Lab
University of Maryland School of Medicine

Dr. Braun is a physician-scientist whose innovative work in neurorehabilitation is advancing how we understand and deliver rehabilitation for individuals after stroke. Her research program centers on precision neurorehabilitation: identifying biological, genetic and behavioral predictors of recovery and using those insights to optimize rehabilitation interventions. She has been an investigator in multicenter stroke recovery genomics studies, which have advanced the understanding of topics such as domain-specific recovery phenotyping, improved prediction of persistent upper extremity deficits, and novel genomic associations with motor improvement. As a member of the International Stroke Genomics Consortium, Dr. Braun contributes to global consensus standards for emerging genomic discoveries that will inform rehabilitation worldwide. In parallel, Dr. Braun has pioneered clinical systems that advance access to post-stroke rehabilitation. As Director of the Inpatient Rehabilitation Medicine Program at the University of Maryland Medical Center, she built and expanded the Inpatient Rehabilitation Medicine Program, implementing innovative clinical pathways for dysphagia management and an accelerated recovery pathway to optimize throughput and improve care for complex neurological patients. She is also a founding faculty member for the PM&R Residency Program now in development at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

David Chen, MD, FAAPMR
Physiatrist
Gaylord Hospital

A practicing physician at Gaylord Specialty Healthcare with board certification in Clinical Informatics, Dr. Chen is an expert at identifying operational pain points in healthcare delivery and designing technology-enabled solutions to improve efficiency, access and patient outcomes. Dr. Chen was a finalist in Yale New Haven Health's inaugural Health AI Championship. His project, an AI-driven pre-authorization optimization platform, stood out for its creativity, practicality and potential to transform care delivery. His platform addresses a particularly complex challenge for long-term acute care hospitals, where each insurance provider maintains unique admission criteria, documentation requirements and approval processes. His approach aims to reduce preventable denials, streamline authorization workflows, and free clinicians from time-consuming appeals. This scalable framework is adaptable across payer systems and clinical settings, and supports PM&R's mission to promote function, independence and quality of life.

Raymond Chou, MD, FAAPMR
Clinical Assistant Professor
Stanford University School of Medicine

Dr. Chou is a physiatrist at Stanford University School of Medicine, pioneering subspecialization in non-operative hand and upper extremity care. He founded the International Society of Hand and Upper Extremity Physiatrists, a non-profit organization with a focus on developing educational content for physiatrists interested in the subspecialty. He is the Director of the Gaming and Tech Injury Medicine Program at Stanford Healthcare which focuses on holistic clinical care and research to address repetitive strain injury that can occur with occupational and recreational activities related to electronic device use. Dr. Chou has presented on the diagnosis and management of dynamic compressive neuropathies, such as neurogenic thoracic outlet syndrome, pronator syndrome, and radial tunnel syndrome, through national symposia and hands-on skills sessions at AAPM&R and AANEM. Furthermore, he is working to increase awareness of PM&R's role in the care continuum by showcasing point-of-care ultrasound, electrodiagnostic studies, and non-operative treatment modalities at hand surgery societies. By developing educational programs on non-emergent musculoskeletal care for the hand and upper extremity, he wants to ensure that musculoskeletal PM&R specialists who do not specialize specifically in the hand and upper extremity have the education and knowledge-base to accurately diagnose and manage patients with these injuries.

Dan Cushman, MD, FAAPMR
Sports Medicine Physician
University of Utah

Dr. Cushman is a physiatrist practicing musculoskeletal, sports medicine and musculoskeletal ultrasound at the University of Utah. As faculty at the University of Utah, he frequently works with trainees including medical students, residents and fellows, positively influencing future generations of physicians. As part of his research responsibilities, he has been a pivotal figure in the procurement of funding, set up and coordination of multiple long-term ultrasound studies, and has presented research across the U.S. and world in various formats. In clinic, his patients appreciate each interaction with him; consistently leaving positive reviews due to his bedside manner, answering patient questions and concerns thoroughly, and frequently seeing some of the most complex cases of musculoskeletal medicine. Additionally, Dr. Cushman applies the same attention to the athletes on the University of Utah's track and field, and swimming and diving teams. He has established himself as an essential medical expert on value-based evaluation, diagnosis and management of all neuromusculoskeletal and disabling conditions within the realm of musculoskeletal and sports medicine.

Clay Guynn, DO, FAAPMR
Sports Medicine Physician
Northside Hospital Sports Medicine Specialists

Dr. Guynn is largely involved in cryoneurolysis education and advocacy to offer his chronic pain and spasticity patients with an option that provides quick, reliable improvements in pain and function. He traveled to Canada to learn from the spasticity cryoneurolysis world expert and then became the second person in America to treat a patient with iovera cryoneurolysis for spasticity management. He has taught at the national level over the years for these procedures and will be teaching internationally at ISPRM. Previously, Dr. Guynn has taught at AAP, AOA, AAPM&R, OSET, AMSSM, AOCPMR, Amputee Coalition and the national O&P conference. He is the first person in the United States who was able to treat a patient with the iovera medial branch needle for low back pain and was a part of a group of seven physicians on the advisory board for creation of this needle and implementation of national education for medial branch cryoneurolysis. He continues to be a patient advocate as a representative for iovera cryoneurolysis to two of the Medicare MACs open meetings that were recently held. He continues to educate others on cryoneurolosis benefits through his publications. Dr. Guynn mentors many medical students with the success of several students matching into a PM&R residency each year.

Matthew Haas, MD, FAAPMR
Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia/ University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Haas is a pediatric physiatrist advocating and leading national efforts to strengthen the physician workforce in pediatric rehabilitation medicine (PRM). During his faculty positions at two institutions, he has been integral to expanding training opportunities for medical students and PM&R residents. He volunteered to lead a Tri-Organizational Committee [between ABPMR, AAP and AAPM&R] to design and advance a novel training pathway that leads to certification in PRM. During 2025-2026, Dr. Haas has worked with a national team to craft an Advancing Innovation in Residency Education (AIRE) program proposal through the ACGME to address workforce shortages and expand the pipeline of PRM-trained physicians to improve patient access to this essential care. Recently, he was awarded the ABMS Scholars Grant, through which he is leading a national mixed-methods study assessing factors such as exposure, motivation, and career pathways that influence trainee decisions to pursue PRM. Dr. Haas will graduate in May 2026 with his Master's in Medical Education, and plans to continue his focus on assessment, competency-based medical education, and program evaluation across program, institution and national levels. His goal is to enhance the preparedness of graduating trainees and elevate standard of care delivered to patients.

Daniel C. Herman, MD, PhD, FAAPMR
Associate Professor
University of California at Davis

Dr. Herman is a leading voice in sports injury prevention and athlete safety advocacy. He focuses his work on concussion injury prevention in women's lacrosse which features a high concussion injury risk despite rules prohibiting body checking or other contact. He has led several projects investigating the use of headgear for concussion prevention, which have demonstrated concussion risk reduced by as much as 50% with headgear use. Dr. Herman has been highly active with the promotion of these results and its implications to a wide range of stakeholders, policy makers and governing bodies in women's lacrosse. These include equipment standards organizations, national governing bodies, multiple state and local governing bodies, industry partners and more. Dr. Herman has ongoing research projects regarding other questions of athlete safety, including the use of eye protection in women's field hockey, goal safety standards in soccer and protective headgear in surfing. Through this and his other efforts, Dr. Herman is advancing PM&R through advocacy for and education of his patient population as well as engagement with the sport community at multiple levels.

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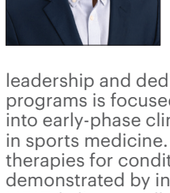
Prathap Jayaram, MD, FAAPMR
Director of Regenerative Sports Medicine & Associate Professor
Emory University School of Medicine

Dr. Jayaram is an Associate Professor, Director of Regenerative Medicine and Translational Research at Emory University and is dedicated to impacting the field through innovative research, clinical leadership and dedicated mentorship. His research programs is focused on rapidly translating lab discoveries into early-phase clinical trials, addressing critical needs in sports medicine. His work focuses on cell-based therapies for conditions like knee osteoarthritis, demonstrated by initiating the first FDA/Phase 3 trial of MFAT (adipose cell therapy) at Emory. He received an 800K grant from the Arthritis Foundation as Co-PI along with Miguel Otero and Scott Rodeo from HSS in assessing the role of cBMA in patients that are undergoing ACL revision surgery. He also serves as the Co-Lead on the clinical trials core of the VA Center Grant, CrEATE Motion where novel therapies for post-traumatic osteoarthritis are being studied. Dr. Jayaram's influence extends through numerous peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, notably in PM&R, The American Journal of Sports Medicine, Osteoarthritis and Cartilage and Human Genetics. These works contribute to the evidence-based foundation of regenerative medicine, influencing clinical practice and research directions. He also serves as an Editorial Board Member for The American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. In addition to his institutional leadership, Dr. Jayaram has organized and directed numerous courses and conferences both nationally and internationally. Through his leadership roles within AAPM&R, including chairing guidance statement committees and presenting at the Annual Assembly, his influence on its members has fostered a culture of innovation and collaboration. Serving as a clinical preceptor and faculty advisor, he has mentored numerous residents and fellows at Baylor and Emory, shaping the next generation of PM&R physicians.

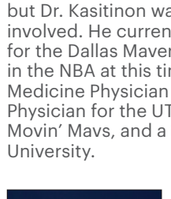


Donald Kasitinon, MD, RMSK, FAAPMR
Medical Director of PM&R Sports Medicine, Associate Program Director of PM&R Residency Program, Assistant Professor
University of Texas Southwestern Medical School

Dr. Kasitinon demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary care for musculoskeletal patients as well as highlighting the vital role of physiatry in patient care. With his arrival at UT Southwestern and the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex, the importance of the PM&R Sports Medicine physician has grown due to his perseverance and skill. He has spearheaded a large annual Adaptive Sports Expo that highlights all the teams, events and programs that are available for individuals of all abilities. Dr. Kasitinon has developed relationships with local high school and university athletic programs as well as professional soccer clubs, and by helping to build the practice and reputation, he contributed to UT Southwestern physicians becoming the official team doctors of the Dallas Mavericks. He is considered a vital member of the Sports Medicine team by PM&R, orthopedics and the institution's administration. Most of the people who served to secure the Dallas Mavericks contract were department chairs or administrators, but Dr. Kasitinon was one of the few full-time clinicians involved. He currently serves as a lead team physician for the Dallas Mavericks (one of the few PM&R physicians in the NBA at this time), the Head Primary Care Sports Medicine Physician for Dallas Trinity FC, the Head Team Physician for the UT Arlington Movin' Mavs and Lady Movin' Mavs, and a team physician for Dallas Baptist University.

Adam Lewno, DO, FAAPMR
Assistant Professor
University of Michigan

Dr. Lewno's influence extends beyond his clinical practice through his commitment as an educator and mentor. Whether teaching the finer points of ultrasound interpretation or discussing nuanced treatment strategies, he empowers students and colleagues alike to grow into confident, capable and compassionate physicians. He designed a longitudinal, multi-tiered curriculum integrating anatomy, pathology and procedural ultrasound into daily physiatric training, which is used as a national model. By combining live scanning, simulation and functional rehabilitation, he redefined ultrasound as an extension of the physical exam. He has taught more than 50 national ultrasound workshops (AAPM&R, AMSSM, ACSM, AAP), training several clinicians and expanding access to precision-based care. As an editor for the AMSSM Case Study Library and Medical Director of Eastern Michigan University's Master of Athletic Training Program, Dr. Lewno's mentorship of residents and fellows has launched numerous careers and national presentations, while his scholarly work and peer-review service elevate academic excellence across the specialty.



Diana Molinares, MD, FAAPMR
Director of Oncology Rehabilitation Medicine
Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine

Dr. Molinares is the Founder and Director of the Cancer Rehabilitation Fellowship at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. This is one of the few programs in the nation dedicated to preparing physiatrists to lead multidisciplinary cancer rehabilitation teams. She also serves as the Program Director of the PM&R Residency Program where she has modernized training to integrate lifestyle medicine, cancer survivorship and advanced procedures into the core curriculum. Regionally, Dr. Molinares' work has catalyzed collaborations across Florida institutions, positioning PM&R as a core component of comprehensive cancer care. Her fellowship and training programs are creating a sustainable pipeline of specialists equipped to meet growing population needs. At the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, she established institutional pathways for cancer prehabilitation and survivorship rehabilitation—bridging oncology and physiatry through systematic screening, early referral models and data driven quality improvement. She currently chairs the AAPM&R Cancer Rehabilitation Medicine Member Community, helping lead strategic initiatives to expand the field. Through her leadership, education and advocacy, Dr. Molinares continues to expand visibility, relevance, and the future pipeline of Cancer Rehabilitation Medicine—ensuring the specialty remains at the forefront of restoring function and quality of life for patients across the continuum of care.

An Ngo-Huang, DO, FAAPMR
Associate Professor
University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Dr. Ngo-Huang is a nationally-recognized leader and innovator in cancer rehabilitation whose work has reshaped how rehabilitation and prehabilitation are integrated into oncology care. She has more than 40 peer-reviewed original publications on the subject of cancer rehabilitation, which is centered on improving physical function, quality of life and treatment tolerance for patients with cancer. She has presented nationally and internationally on the role of prehabilitation in the U.S., focusing on building a prehabilitation program, weight loss and malnutrition management pre-transplant, exercise education and disparities in healthcare of cancer rehabilitation patients. As Assistant Program Director to the cancer rehabilitation fellowship at MD Anderson, she personally trained several classes of fellowship graduates who have started their own prehabilitation programs across the nation. She served as the 2019-2021 Cancer Rehabilitation Physician Consortium Member Community Research Subgroup chair and continues to participate in the subgroup. Dr. Ngo-Huang's impact on the PM&R patient population is immense; she has created a rehabilitation pathway for patients at MD Anderson to receive prehabilitation that did not exist. This pathway is now disseminated across the nation in multiple institutions through her trainees.

Obada Obaisi, MD, FAAPMR, DipABLM, CLT
Director of Cancer Rehabilitation and Assistant Professor
RUSH University Medical Centers

Dr. Obaisi is a cancer rehabilitation and lifestyle medicine physician and serves as Director of Cancer Rehabilitation at RUSH MD Anderson Cancer Center in Chicago. He developed and leads a comprehensive cancer rehabilitation program within the academic cancer center, expanding access to specialized rehabilitation services for patients across Chicago, including communities that have historically had limited access to cancer rehabilitation care. His work focuses on integrating rehabilitation earlier and more consistently throughout the cancer care continuum. He has led several innovative clinical initiatives at RUSH, including the RUSH Lymphedema Screening Program, a system-wide bioimpedance surveillance program that enables earlier detection and prevention of lymphedema in cancer survivors. He also founded the RUSH Inpatient Cancer Rehabilitation Mobile Team to ensure hospitalized cancer patients receive timely rehabilitation services, and established a multidisciplinary Trismus Clinic integrating physiatry, speech-language pathology, and prosthodontics to improve functional recovery for head and neck cancer survivors. Nationally, Dr. Obaisi contributes to advancing the field through invited lectures, peer-reviewed publications, and book chapters focused on cancer rehabilitation, prehabilitation and survivorship care. As Director of Education for the RUSH PM&R Residency Program, he leads educational initiatives and mentors trainees pursuing careers in oncologic rehabilitation. Through these efforts, he continues to expand awareness of cancer rehabilitation and improve functional outcomes and quality of life for patients living with and beyond cancer.

Aileen Padilla, DO, MBA, FAAPMR
Interventional Pain Physiatrist
Modern Pain Solutions

Dr. Padilla is an interventional pain physiatrist known to others as @PainlessPadilla, she leverages social media to advance the field of PM&R and pain management by creating educational content for both patients and healthcare professionals. Her content is not only evidence-based and educational but also engaging and approachable. Dr. Padilla bridges the gap between cutting-edge medical knowledge and everyday patient experience; empowering patients to better understand their options, trusting modern pain care and encouraging clinicians to adopt best practices. Her influence extends beyond the exam room, shaping a new era where expert pain management is demystified, patient-centered and widely accessible. Her social media and presence in many societies keep her peers and patients up-to-date on what she is doing in the field of interventional spine as well as education. Dr. Padilla also collaborates with interventional societies and industry to work on new device iterations, provide training and live demonstrations for fellow pain specialists, and provide study feedback.

Rupak D. Parikh, MD, FAAPMR
Chief Executive Officer
American Rehabilitation Care (ARC)

Dr. Rupak Parikh is a visionary Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) physician and the CEO of American Rehabilitation Care (ARC). Dr. Parikh developed an innovative, service-based clinical model that positions PM&R at the epicenter of the care continuum. His strategic framework ensures the safe and efficient transition of patients, a model that has gained national traction and is currently being integrated across multiple major hospital systems. At the heart of Dr. Parikh's mission is the Transitions of Life Care℠ (TLC) program. This initiative was born from his commitment to addressing the complexities of the modern healthcare landscape, particularly for at-risk and underserved geriatric populations. By prioritizing physiatrist-led intervention, the TLC model ensures that every patient is transitioned to the appropriate setting, at the optimal time, for the precise duration required to achieve maximum functional recovery; ensuring the patient is "at the right level of care, at the right time, for the right time." In addition, Dr. Parikh successfully bridged the gap between academia and private practice, creating synergistic partnerships that solve chronic challenges such as physician coverage, operational agility and resident training. He has scaled his model to serve vulnerable communities, transforming PM&R into a vital tool for social clinical impact. Through the evolution of his SuperSNF™ and Home Sweet Home™ models, Dr. Parikh continues to scale value-based care. His work ensures that physiatry-led, high-acuity rehabilitation is accessible in skilled nursing and home environments. Dr. Parikh is transforming PM&R into a powerful engine for health equity and systemic clinical impact.

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Daniel Pierce, MD, FAAPMR
Assistant Professor
University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha VA Medical Center, Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, Bryan Medical Center

Dr. Pierce focuses his efforts on physiatry brand-building and workforce development. Borrowing from the environmental philosophy to "think global, act local," he began his career at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), which had recently established a PM&R department, with the express goal of building rehabilitation medicine locally to support the specialty's long-term growth nationally. Clinically, he has helped to expand access to physiatric services through leadership roles across several Omaha-area hospitals, emphasizing the integration of rehabilitation medicine into population health programs. Within undergraduate medical education, he has introduced many UNMC students to physiatry and expanded the disability-inclusive medical curriculum, eventually receiving the university's Silver U Award for these efforts while mentoring an increasing number of students pursuing the specialty. Dr. Pierce also strengthens local rehabilitation care systems through policy, advocacy and community engagement. These activities include service as Vice President of the Board for the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska and appointments to the state of Nebraska's Medicaid Advisory Committee, the American Medical Association House of Delegates, and the AAPM&R State Advocacy Committee to ensure that PM&R's voice is representative, scalable, and strategically positioned in both the local and national healthcare landscape.

Diya Sandhu, MD, FAAPMR
Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of Supportive Care Medicine
City of Hope Orange County Lennar Foundation Cancer Center

Dr. Sandhu is the first physician at City of Hope Orange County Lennar Foundation Cancer Center to practice both PM&R and interventional pain. She established a new drug program which offers patients with intractable neuropathy a new therapeutic option when others had failed. She fearlessly embraced the complexities of both Cancer Pain and Cancer PM&R clinical practice, carving out a space where few had ventured before and setting the stage for broader adoption of these essential services. She led the creation of standard operating procedures for pain management and developed internal guidelines for caring for patients with substance use issues. Outside of clinic, Dr. Sandhu has a strong commitment to advocacy; most recently championing the adoption of BAT (breast, axilla and thyroid) lead protection for women in the fluoroscopy suite, a pioneering step toward preventing occupational cancers in employees at a top cancer hospital.

Sarah Smith, MD, FAAPMR
Physiatrist
University of Washington

Dr. Sarah Smith is a physiatrist at the University of Washington creating new treatment and clinic models. Recently, she has partnered with plastic surgeon Dr. Katie Liu to develop an innovative multidisciplinary treatment model for peripheral nerve injuries. This model includes plastic surgery, rehabilitation medicine, hand therapy and rehab psychology. Patients are referred within an earlier window of recovery to help assess and predict potential for spontaneous recovery or need for surgical intervention. Dr. Smith's unique neuromuscular and nerve ultrasound training allows her to perform these complex electrodiagnostic and sonographic evaluations to help make these determinations. The multidisciplinary team supports every patient through the full spectrum of care, from diagnosis to surgery to rehabilitation. The clinic also sees patients with compressive nerve injuries, neuroma after limb amputation, and other non-traumatic nerve and plexus injuries. As the Northwest Institute for Nerve Injury at UW Medicine, they serve the broader WWAMI region, providing this specialized care to patients in Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho.

Azlan Tariq, DO, FAAPMR
Chief Clinical Innovation Officer
Medrina

Dr. Azlan Tariq is a national leader at the intersection of physiatry, technology and health system transformation. As Chief Clinical Innovation Officer of Medrina, he leads clinical strategy for the largest physiatry practice in the United States, supporting more than 1,200 providers across 1,400 locations in 47 states. In this role, he has driven the integration of technology and data-driven care models into post-acute medicine, advancing scalable approaches that reduce readmissions, improve outcomes, and enhance operational efficiency. As Chair of the Innovation & Artificial Intelligence Member Community Dr. Tariq has played a key role in positioning the specialty at the forefront of responsible AI adoption. He has built and led a national community of physiatrists focused on evaluating, implementing, and shaping emerging technologies in real-world clinical practice. Through his leadership and educational contributions, including multiple presentations at the 2025 Annual Assembly, he has helped define how innovation can be meaningfully integrated into physiatry. Dr. Tariq's longstanding commitment to the Academy is reflected in his service across multiple national initiatives, including the Future Leaders Program, the Skilled Nursing Facility Think Tank, and prior committee work focused on specialty growth and visibility. His recognition as a Distinguished Member underscores his sustained impact and dedication to advancing the field.

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Adam Tenforde, MD, FAAPMR
Director of Running Medicine and Shockwave Medicine, Associate Professor, Harvard Medical School
Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital

Dr. Tenforde has published more than 180 peer-reviewed manuscripts on topics related to sports medicine. His primary clinical innovation and research has advanced our understanding on bone stress injuries, including leading multiple research investigations serving as senior author on "Bone stress injury" for Nature Diseases Review Primers and assembling an international Delphi Statement to advance knowledge on best terminology and practice management. As Director of Running Medicine and Shockwave Medicine at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, he was tasked with building their flagship outpatient program at Boston Landing (now part of Mass General Brigham Sports Medicine). In addition, Dr. Tenforde established shockwave therapy as a tool for use in PM&R, giving 43 talks both nationally and internationally on the topic and serving as co-director for the first shockwave workshop at the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine.

Yetsa Tuakli-Wosornu, MD, MPH, FAAPMR
Associate Professor and Founding Director of the Sports Equity Lab
Stanford University

As a former elite athlete, Dr. Tuakli-Wosornu redefined the concept of "sports equity" in 2017 when she founded the Sports Equity Lab (SEL), formalizing a field of study that extends beyond individual characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status) or access to sport. Instead, sports equity is positioned as a comprehensive lens through which to understand and advance human flourishing. SEL is a global research and innovation group focused on the often-overlooked, intangible dimensions of performance, including safety, belonging, dignity and healthy relationships. These elements are distilled into what SEL defines as the "3 C's": culture, connection and care. Its vision is a world in which all individuals have access to culture-forward, relational, and caring sport systems—and the tools within them—to achieve and sustain excellence in sport and society. Her interdisciplinary team consists of global athletes, scientists, and students. Through short films, scholarly publications, symposia, and a mobility aid fabrication facility in Ghana, SEL translates research into action—expanding access and redefining performance through equity and care. Since its inception, SEL has gained stature and influence worldwide. Dr. Tuakli-Wosornu is currently an Associate Editor of the British Journal of Sports Medicine; with 60+ peer-reviewed publications, she continues to promote holistic wellbeing in and through sport. In alignment with her research, she recently held the "Rebecca Cheptegei Symposium & Design Lab" at Stanford, honoring the one-year anniversary of the Ugandan Olympian's passing. She designed this event to reflect the belief that sustainable high performance—rooted in culture, connection, and care—is the new standard of excellence in sport. This two-day event included internationally recognized athletes and coaches, scientists, clinicians, influencers, sports reporters and sports industry representatives.

Tiffany Wood, DO
Resident
University of Michigan PM&R Program

Dr. Wood is a resident who is leading in PM&R through organization involvement, research and advocacy. As President of the AOCPMR Student Council, she reshaped national engagement by building mentorship pipelines, nationwide lectures, and virtual research programs that connected and strengthened collaboration across osteopathic and allopathic communities. Now as their Resident Council Vice President, she continues to mentor future leaders. Her ongoing research and presentations at AAPM&R, AOCPMR and the Association of Academic Physiatrists (AAP) reflect her growing scholarly footprint—covering diverse topics from accessibility in outdoor environments to rehabilitation outcomes and health equity. These contributions advance the specialty's evidence base while amplifying PM&R's relevance to public health, policy and patient advocacy. Clinically, she is collaborating with urology to improve care models for patients with SCI and neurogenic bladder. Through her research and personally navigating her father's SCI, Dr. Wood is devoting her career to ensuring patients facing similar life-altering events find rehabilitation that restores both function and hope. Her impact lies in her ability to connect leadership, empathy, and elevating trainee engagement, expanding access to education, and promoting evidence-informed, compassionate care, to help shape a more inclusive and forward-thinking future for PM&R.

Justin Weppner, DO, MEd, CBIST-AP, FAAPMR
Section Chief, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

As Section Chief of PM&R at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, Dr. Weppner is leading the expansion of the rehabilitation hospital from 33 to 50 beds, increasing access to high-quality, patient-centered care for an underserved population. He developed and currently directs a Brain Injury Center that unites 13 providers across 10 specialties, creating a regional hub for advanced brain injury management. He introduced vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) for stroke recovery to Southwest Virginia and introduced the first program for cryoneurolysis for post-spasticity pain in Virginia. His research lab explores endocrine dysfunction and biomarkers in TBI, with recent publications in JAMA Open, and he collaborates with industry partners to advance TBI science. He serves as a board member for both Brain Injury Solutions and Brain Injury Association of Virginia advocating for individuals with acquired brain injuries. As a Certified Brain Injury Specialist (CBIS) Advanced Practitioner, he is a national leader in brain injury education, providing certified training nationwide and serving on the national subcommittee responsible for the Essential Brain Injury Guide. Dr. Weppner is also dedicated to mentorship and national education, developing and leading a leadership program for early-career physicians through AOCPMR, and serving on the AAPM&R Digital Learning and Medical Education Committees.

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Mohammad Yasin, DO
Resident
Montefiore Einstein PM&R Program

Dr. Mohamad Yasin, a fourth-year resident in the Montefiore Einstein Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Program, has built a unique bridge between medicine, media and community engagement. Known to more than 130,000 followers across social media as @ScrubbyMo, he uses humor, culture and relatable storytelling to introduce audiences to the field of PM&R and make medicine more approachable. Through short-form videos and storytelling, Dr. Yasin breaks down barriers between physicians and patients—destigmatizing medical topics, sharing behind-the-scenes insights into life in medicine, and promoting wellness in underserved communities. His work has resonated not only with the general public but also with younger and more diverse medical professionals who see in him a model for integrating authenticity, culture, and creativity into a medical career. In addition to his work in medicine and digital education, Dr. Yasin collaborates with health and lifestyle brands that support his mission of expanding awareness and improving community health. He also contributes to physician advocacy by leading social media initiatives for the Bronx County Medical Society, helping highlight the needs of under-resourced patient communities in the Bronx. Outside of medicine and media, Dr. Yasin is also a business owner of Filli Café in Long Island, reflecting his entrepreneurial interests and commitment to building community spaces both online and offline. Following the completion of residency, Dr. Yasin will be pursuing fellowship training in Interventional Pain Management, further advancing his dedication to helping patients restore function, mobility and quality of life.

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Thank you to the 2026 class of Innovators & Influencers Honorees. You've each made a positive impact on the specialty and the patients that you serve. Keep up the great work!

Stay tuned for the 2027 Innovators & Influencers Honoree nominations—coming this fall.