



## I Appreciate Being a PA in Washington

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As all of us who work in medicine know, this can be a grinding field, often scattered with burned out colleagues. I think about the importance of self-care from time to time, and occasionally actually do something that likely counts as self-care.

But one thing I've focused on recently, as far as framing my profession, is the spirit-lifting power of gratitude. Like many of my colleagues, a fast-pace at work coupled with high-stakes outcomes sometimes make gratitude seem far away, like an old friend who I've lost touch with. Yet I've learned a lot about gratitude, appreciation and their healing powers from both patients and providers. I work in an Opioid Treatment Program, with patients who have Opioid Use Disorder. My patients as a group have faced an inordinate amount of emotional and physical trauma in their lives, and their personal stories often draw a clear trajectory path from their births to having Opioid Use Disorder.

Still, so many of them exhibit gratitude and appreciation that is inspiring and a wonderful example of how important those things are. My patients are almost always profusely thankful when they enter and leave my office. Even when things are not going swimmingly for them, they are some of the most overtly polite and civil people I have met. They voice their appreciation for big and little things (one patient told me, "I really like what you've done with your office!"), and occasionally leave me speechless as they part with "have a blessed weekend!"

And how can I be around that kind of behavior and not have it rub off on me? It certainly has, and over the last few years, I've learned from them the power of gratitude and appreciation for those of us doing the tough work that is medicine. I now try to routinely tell providers how much I appreciate their efforts. I also work to tell my co-workers how I appreciate them when they go out of their way for a patient, or for me as well. Much of my day is spent walking through our large building going from room-to-room or escorting a patient. I encounter patients throughout the day. I have experimented over the last year, where I see what happens when I say 'hi' to every patient I pass. It ends up being a lot of hellos, but it's yielded wonderful results. Many of our patients are not used to being treated with respect, and often walk with eyes down, and expression flat, hoping to avoid unnecessary human interaction. But when faced with me walking by saying "Good morning!" some of them instantly transform, often looking up and returning the greeting. They mostly appear to appreciate it greatly.

Before I was a PA-C, I was an ATC (Certified Athletic Trainer). I worked with a lot of high school, college, and professional athletes. Part of one of my jobs was staffing football games for Cleveland High School in Seattle. At that time the football program was very down, with very small turnout (19 players one year), and a long string of losing seasons. There was a young head coach there who took over the program, and he was the master of appreciation. Following games, often lost by lopsided scores, he would have the players and coaches stand around in a circle in the locker room, holding hands. It was called the appreciation circle. He would start, and he would offer a specific appreciation for one of the players or coaches, and then the next person would do the same. Each one took about 30 seconds, not long. But each player was expected to say something, and they all did. No one thought it was weird, and in fact they appeared to warm to it, and come up with heartfelt and authentic things to appreciate in what someone had done during the game. It was moving.

Which brings being grateful for my ability to appreciate the things that make being a PA-C in this state so meaningful. I appreciate being one of two PAs on the WMC, and the connection and empathy it appears to bring to other commissioners and staff in understanding what PAs are. For us PAs, being on the WMC develops a deep understanding for what our MDs and colleagues do. I appreciate practicing in a state where we have a fantastic PA association (Washington Academy of PAs), working closely with our MD colleagues in the Washington State Medical association, and the resulting improvement and modernization of PA practice in the last decades.

This has culminated recently in the recent new PA laws that the state has adopted, allowing PAs to practice to a fuller scope, while continuing to build and enhance the traditions of PAs working side-by-side with MDs, and learning daily from them. I appreciate working with my amazing patients and appreciate the opportunity on the commission to be able to give voice to patients who sometimes may feel like they have none. And finally, I appreciate the trust that this state places in PAs, and the acknowledgement we receive here for the important role the PA profession has played in expanding the care and improving the health and safety of all patients, regardless of their income or insurance status.

That's a lot of appreciation, and I've had some pretty good teachers along the way.