

HOW A PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SAVED MY LIFE!

FLOOR DIRECTOR FOR ASSEMBLY SPEAKER, FABIAN NÚÑEZ, EXCLAIMS, "A PA SAVED MY LIFE!"

by **Gaye Breyman, CAE**
Chief Operating Officer

CAPA's Legislative Day in Sacramento was a huge success for many reasons. To start with, we met with over a dozen legislators, many of whom already had a good understanding of what a PA is and does. That was very good!

Assemblymember Karen Bass (a PA and good friend to CAPA) arranged for CAPA leaders to be recognized on the floor of the Assembly during a full session. Majority Leader Bass presented a beautiful proclamation on behalf of the California Assembly to CAPA President, Jennifer Faggionato; PPC Chair, Bob Miller and President Elect, Miguel Medina. State photographers' cameras flashed and the members of the Assembly applauded as Karen recognized the contributions PAs make to California's health care system. That was very cool!

After that, Karen allowed us to use her beautiful, historic office to host a luncheon for members of the Assembly, the Senate and some of their staff. There we were, rubbing elbows with the legislators who hold your professional future in their hands, sharing a bite to eat before they ran off to their next appointment and/or session. They were appreciative and gracious. You could tell that all of them had great admiration and respect for Karen. She is impressive, a rising star in Sacramento and

has done a great deal to put a face to the PA profession in the Capitol. We were very proud to see our friend being held in such high esteem.

One of the people who came to enjoy a bite of lunch and say hello to us was Lou Leary, Floor Director for Assembly Speaker, Fabian Núñez. We began to chat with Mr. Leary and he said, "I know all about PAs, one saved my life." Well, all within earshot got very quiet and Mr. Leary told the greatest story about his experience while being treated by a PA several years ago. We encouraged him to write an article for the *CAPA News* and he graciously accepted. The article appears to the right.

Stories like this remind us again that each and every patient encounter with a physician assistant creates an opportunity for you to not only provide exceptional care, but the quality of that *PA experience* will likely affect that patient's view of an entire profession. Mr. Leary is living a full, wonderful life and walking the halls of our State Capitol every day. When the opportunity presents itself, he remembers and shares his *PA experience* with his colleagues and friends. That is priceless!

Remember, the lives you touch today will go on to touch many others. You may never know the extent to which that one encounter will impact their (or our) world. Thank you, Mr. Leary, for sharing your story.



L to R: Lou Leary, with former Democratic Vice Presidential candidate (1984) Geraldine Ferraro, and former California State Senator, Tim Leslie

All have been diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma and all are survivors!!

by **Lou Leary**
Floor Director for Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, California State Legislature

I know deep in my heart that physician assistants provide high-quality and cost-effective health care. Why? Because one saved my life!! And here is the story:

Many years ago (1990), I was a volunteer on the first re-election campaign for then State Assemblyman Bob Epple (Bob represented the Downey-Norwalk area of Los Angeles County). I was working hard one day using a heavy staple gun to build hundreds of lawn signs for the campaign. Boy did my hands ache after all that work! My right hand hurt so much that I complained to my supervisor on the campaign who said maybe it was Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

— a problem which many grocery checkers encounter as a result of their repetitive motions checking and bagging groceries.

I took an afternoon off from the campaign and visited my HMO which had a facility in the area. The doctor who examined me also thought I had Carpal Tunnel Syndrome because of the indications: pain, numb fingertips, a history of repetitive acts, etc.

Continued on page 5

SEE INSERT

Teaming With Pride

Send us your photo today!

ASK, ADVISE, REFER... THREE WORDS, A ROADMAP FOR THREE OTHERS.

by Larry Rosen, PA-C

Vice President and PR Committee Chair

4 80,000 people die of tobacco-related deaths in the United States every year, 5 million world-wide. Staggering figures. Smoking remains an epidemic of monumental proportion. We cannot vaccinate against it. We cannot kill it with antibiotics. But what we can do is fight it with a variety of resources we do have. One such resource is the California Smokers' Helpline.

The Helpline interacts with almost 90,000 callers every year. Their leaders, in concert with the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center at UC San Francisco, contacted CAPA with a request to form a special panel of PAs from across the state to meet, share ideas and formulate a plan to better serve our patients with the cessation of tobacco use.

On April 28th, 15 CAPA members gathered in San Diego at the Helpline offices. We toured their facility, watched and listened in as Helpline counselors talked with callers who wanted to stop smoking, many desperate after years of failure. We also shared our personal stories about tobacco use.

9 of the 15 in attendance were at one-time smokers (me included.)

"In the Navy, I drove a submarine in a room not much bigger than a walk-in closet. Five guys were in there with me, all of us smoking at once. I had to stop."

"I smoked for 35 years, quit for 15. I still have occasional relapses and I'm not happy about it. It never gets easy."

"Many times I'd quit. Once, I threw my cigarettes in the toilet. Minutes later I fished them out, dried them off and started again. How sick was that?"

The struggle with addiction is a personal one. Whether it is alcohol, drugs, tobacco,

or food, the issues are painful and deeply rooted in our individual needs and regrets. Control, if ever, is hard won. It comes with sacrifice and draws on courage we hardly knew we had. The decision to take charge of our lives is singular. The battle to get there need not be fought alone.

As physician assistants, we have a unique advantage in this area. We have the opportunity to talk about stopping tobacco use each and every time we see a patient who uses. For the sake of our patients, these are opportunities we can ill afford to waste.

Our purpose in meeting in San Diego was threefold: to educate ourselves in the mission of the California Smokers' Helpline, to better understand the issues and triggers that lead to tobacco addiction and to formulate a plan for California PAs to increase their intervention effectiveness.

Scores of PAs answered CAPA's request to participate in this project. Selecting 15 was difficult. Each had excellent motives for wanting to be there. Final decisions were made based on the particular practices they were involved in and the applicant's personal commitment to working with addictive behaviors. It was a phenomenal group:

Jeremy Adler, PA-C La Mesa, CA
Margaret Allen, PA-C East Palo Alto, CA
Robin Beresford, PA-C San Jose, CA
Rachelle Blake, PA San Francisco, CA
Denis Hentrich, PA-C McCloud, CA
Joseph Hobbs, PA-C Lincoln, CA
Andrew Inocelda, PA-S La Mesa, CA
Cathy Ochs, PA-C Shingletown, CA
Sheri Oswald, PA-C Fresno, CA
Tim Patchin, PA-C Marina, CA
Kelly Pate, PA-C Folsom, CA
Ashika Shankar, PA-S Visalia, CA
Julie Theriault, PA-C Elk Grove, CA
Janice Tramel, PA-C Alhambra, CA
Kristen Woods, PA-C Berkeley, CA

All brought ideas about how to deal with the problem: hypnosis, medications, herbal remedies, nicotine substitutes and counseling. A PA from San Francisco convinced her physician to include asking about tobacco use as a vital sign. We may, on occasion, have challenged each other's approaches, but we agreed on two things: we're not doing a good enough job and we need to do better.



An exceptional group of PAs came together to create the Smoking Cessation Workgroup

The California Smokers' Helpline is a group of dedicated, committed professionals whose work is supported by Proposition 99, the Tobacco Tax and Health Protection Act of 1988 and Proposition 10, the California Children and Families Act of 1998. 45 counselors staff the Helpline. Most are bilingual, speaking Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean and/or Vietnamese.

7,000-8,000 calls are received each month. About half are smokers. Others are tobacco users and non-smokers calling for help with smokers in their lives. Most quitters go cold turkey, yet 78% of the smokers who call believe they are addicted, 83% are worried about quitting and 86% believe help is important.

Success is measured by a 12-month abstinence rate. 26.7% of their callers who receive multiple counseling sessions achieve this goal. At first glance, this may not seem to be an impressive number. But consider how good you would feel if 27 out of every one hundred patients you counseled about smoking actually quit? The Helpline is helping nearly 2,200 people a year do just that!

SAVE A LIFE

With the guidance of the Helpline staff, over the course of the day, a three-point program was adopted: ASK, ADVISE, REFER.

ASK

Despite best intentions, most of us are not taking advantage of our patient contacts to regularly inquire about tobacco use. We are more inclined to do so when we see that pack of cigarettes in their pocket or purse or when we smell it on their clothing. Each patient encounter, however, opens the door to ask: Do you smoke? If so, do you want to quit?

Engaging the patient in a discussion about smoking is an important foot in the door. Many patients feel guilty even at the question and are quick to say they want to stop or have tried to stop or are trying to stop. Sharing their frustration and anger is a window into why they have opted to continue a behavior that could clearly shorten their life. Talking starts the process and, equally as important, gives the patient the sense that you care enough about their problem to listen.

quit are valued and their disappointment in themselves will be met with compassion and understanding. Take time with them.

Patients need to know their options. “How do I beat this thing?” they ask. Do we advise them to quit cold turkey? Do we discuss medical approaches or group meetings or individual counseling? Whatever you advise, they may not listen to you wholeheartedly the first, second, or fifth time you broach the subject. But if you never stop the process, never giving up on them, your chances for a breakthrough multiply.

REFER

If you know your patient, you’ve got a pretty good idea about what approach has the best shot at striking a chord, but you don’t want to be wrong. You don’t want to start them down a path that could lead to a quick and easy failure, undoing all the good work you’ve done with them and leaving the patient often depressed and filled with self-doubt.

All you need to do is give them a telephone number to call or hand them a “Gold Card” made available by the Helpline. It has the telephone number on it: 1-800-NO-BUTTS. This is a classic no-brainer approach and a perfect, stress-free beginning for the tobacco user who wants to quit. Helpline counselors are skilled probers: patient, insightful, effective. And, every caller gets up to five follow-up calls back.

The California Smokers’ Helpline reached out to CAPA because they heard that PAs were excellent practitioners and educators who take pride in the quality of care they offer their patients. They were right. Smoking cessation presents a perfect opportunity to once again put physician

assistants in the forefront of compassionate care for patients and regard for health issues which require immediate as well as ongoing attention.

A survey sent to CAPA members in an email regarding how PAs deal with the issue of smoking cessation was revealing. Only 36% of respondents felt confident in their ability to help their patients quit smoking, and 81% had no idea what a “Gold Card” was. At this meeting we made a commitment to improving both those numbers significantly

by aggressively promoting this ASK, ADVISE, REFER program throughout the California physician assistant community. It begins with this article.

Get involved.

Check the CAPA website, www.capanet.org, for information on how to obtain “Gold Cards,” brochures and other educational materials. Go directly to the Helpline’s website, www.nobutts.org. Contact the seminar participants listed above. Everyone of them is eager to share their experience with you and assist you in getting better at managing your tobacco-using patients.

The Helpline organized this summit for California physician assistants. CAPA wishes to thank Kirsten Hansen, Outreach Coordinator, as well as Walter Silverman, Catherine Saucedo, Chris Anderson, Rachelle Blake, Susan Brutschy, Jill Macinko, and CAPA’s Gaye Breyman for their tireless work in pulling this off. The only real thanks our Helpline friends want is for you to get involved in their cause and let your patients know that success might only be a phone call away.

ASK, ADVISE, REFER.

Save a life. ☞



The Helpline tour included a behind the scenes look at their sophisticated phone system

ADVISE

Stop smoking! Good advice for sure, but nothing they have not thought about, heard thousands of times, or even tried to do. Speaking for myself, smokers need to be loved, not yelled at. None of my patients have ever quit just because I told them to and wrote in their chart that I “counseled them.” They need to know their efforts to