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## A PA time capsule: A historical window for the future

As the physician assistant profession looks to the future, an opportunity exists to forward a gift of the present in a time capsule. Examples of these caches of goods and information intended for communication to another era reach back to Mesopotamian civilizations and Egyptian tombs. More recent entombments of information include several World's Fairs sites and two Voyager planetary probes. For centuries, families and organizations have periodically created time capsules for posterity. The International Time Capsule Society maintains a global database of all existing capsules. Archiving a social group's history at pivotal times in development is a mark of maturity that shows leadership and progress with one eye on the present and the other looking to the future.

If I were asked to develop a time capsule for the PA profession, this is what I would propose: First, I would create a committee of young and old, PAs and non-PAs, to oversee the process. Diversity within this committee would be a criterion. It should have a year to prepare, as this process should not be rushed.

I hope the committee would select cultural and historical documents of the day. Newspaper headlines, songs, and examples of current fashions would be a nice beginning. Descriptions and examples of the technology in vogue—a laptop and a cell phone—could be included (the batteries should be removed because they leak with time). The latest breakthroughs in genetic understanding should certainly be included.

**The main contents**, however, should be PA-focused. Art and photographs of institutions, such as the AAPA building, and of PAs in action are considerations. A description of the most recent AAPA conference, including a list of attendees, might be insightful for historians. Data and trends of PA growth and development could be complemented by a current list of PA program graduates and institutions. Books may be too bulky, but microfiches and a viewing lens may work. A list of books used by students, and some clinical instruments—stethoscopes and otoscopes—may reveal what was useful or important to us at the time.

Information on the development of the PA profession would be valuable to future scholars. Journals that PAs read, a list of Web sites, and other sources of pertinent information should also be considered. Web sites and CDs may need to be stored as hard copies in some miniaturized format.

Perhaps the committee would canvass the population at large, involve many PAs, and ask for suggestions of items

to include in the capsule. PA representation across the military and other public services will include important views not usually considered in the private sector. A recent poll or census of PAs may be useful. Predictions for what the group believes will be current at the time of opening should be made, such as PAs making up 20% of the US medical workforce in 2030. Hopes for the future can be included as well.

**The committee should write** a report for the capsule that lists the contents, explains how and why certain items were selected, and provides other information considered relevant to the day the capsule was sealed. I hope the committee members would write about their dreams and hopes for America in general and the PA profession in particular. Perhaps each committee member could donate something personal for the capsule that would be irreplaceable but meaningful to future generations—a PA certificate, school ring, family heirloom, personal diary, etc. The Society for the Preservation of PA History would be an important contributor.

The committee would then decide when the time capsule will be opened: in 25, 50, or 100 years. The construction of the capsule and where it would be located are critical.

**Capsules come in all forms**—from coffee cans to fireproof safes. Some of the more impressive capsules are stainless steel. One manufactured capsule resists temperatures up to 2,192°F (1,200°C), is hermetically welded to be water- and airtight, and has a solid lid that is screwed on. Information about the capsule, such as the date of the opening, ownership, and even some of the items contained therein, can be etched on the surface.

Finally, a sealing ceremony would be held. A capsule document that details everything about it—the contents, unsealing date, purpose of the capsule, and who should be present when it is unsealed—should be written. Experts recommend keeping the document and container in a safe place, above ground, and behind a wall; perhaps in the lobby of the AAPA headquarters. Because buried capsules are sometimes forgotten or misplaced, a plaque that designates the location of the capsule should be prominently placed.

**PAs' contributions** to a better society, in the end, may be more than anyone imagined. Historians, economists, sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists studying the course of the PA movement may offer various interpretations; however, a time capsule would give them a clearer picture of what it was like today. **JAAPA**