

ACPM Member Spotlight—Peter Rumm, MD, MPH, FACPM

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Recently, Dr. Peter Rumm, a physician member and an official with the federal government stopped by the Washington, D.C. office of the American College of Preventive Medicine for a visit. The conversation was not a typical chat with a preventive medicine physician, but a very entertaining and informative discussion—a discovery of a very interesting professional journey and series of hobbies and outside interests.

Dr. Rumm has had a very rich career in preventive medicine and currently serves in a leadership position with the Veterans' Administration (VA). In an office called the Health Outcomes of Military Exposures, he leads policy efforts in military environmental exposures and education of physicians who provide clinical care to veterans. This year his focus has been on implementation of the PACT ACT, which was passed in August 2022, providing increased benefits and health care to veterans for military exposures. Previously he has led military treatment facilities, served as the lead Army epidemiologist in Europe, served as a Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist at the state health department in Wisconsin and led an academic center. Prior to the VA he was a deputy director of a medical device division at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and had details or assignments at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Office of the US Surgeon General, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). In his current role, Dr. Rumm helped develop and launch a certification program to ensure all physicians are knowledgeable and trained in providing care for veterans who may have been exposed to various toxins or other harmful environmental exposures while serving the US. His work and service to the VA is so profound, important, and serious, that discovering another side to this physician leader felt like a breath of fresh air.

As I have shared in past articles, each preventive medicine physician has a unique set of skills and interests. I wanted to capture and share Dr. Rumm's insights below, capturing both his impressive career and an intriguing set of hobbies and interests.



Peter Rumm, MD, MPH, FACPM

What attracted you to select Preventive Medicine as your specialty of choice?

As a young professional living in Panama, my early interest was to become a pediatric critical care doctor. However, like most decisions or plans, I was asked to lead a very large clinical healthcare organization working with refugees and my passion for public health became a reality. Working with refugees and people from the embassy crystalized my decision to switch my focus from critical care and become a preventive medicine physician. One key advisor said I would help hundreds in critical care but millions potentially in public health.

0749-3797/\$36.00

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2023.09.014>

How did your training in preventive medicine prepare you for embarking on your career journey?

My residency training in preventive medicine occurred at Madigan Army Medical Center; my Master of Public Health (MPH) was from the University of Washington where I received excellent mentoring and experience working in the Washington State Health Department. The program was both intense and challenging and concentrated on environmental and occupational health and management as those are duties of an Army preventive medicine physician.

Your career in the Federal Government has offered you so many opportunities to travel and see the world. What is the most interesting or unassuming experience you had that you would like to share with your fellow preventive medicine colleagues?

There have been so many opportunities to travel for work as a federal employee, but the most interesting was an assignment to Macedonia in southeastern Europe referred to as a kingdom in Greek antiquity. I was leading an Academic Center called the Center for Public Health Readiness and Communication and was selected as faculty (based on my military background) to co-lead a three-week course in Preparedness sponsored by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As is the case with most NATO-sponsored events, learners were from 14 different countries. It was extremely interesting to meet people who shared an interest in health preparedness from so many countries and it was a great and eclectic experience. I keep in touch with some of my peers from that course to this day.

You shared some very interesting entrepreneurial hobbies with me. How did you decide to pursue an investment in dog care?

As an owner of a 13-year-old cockapoo, St. Charles, I enjoy relaxing in the evenings or weekends in nice spaces with my dog. So, I learned of a company that designed fancy dog parks with restaurants as well as office space to allow for dogs and wanted to invest. This growing company has six current or planned fancy dog parks, so it aligned with my interests, and it brings me joy. Other hobbies include service as a high-school basketball official,

doing live auctions or serving as master of ceremonies for charities. I also just re-joined Rotary and am a former Club President. My goal next year is to take courses in stand-up comedy. (Author commentary: Perhaps we will have to set up time at the ACPM Annual Conference to let him perform.)

What advice would you offer young physicians starting their journey in preventive medicine?

First, embrace diverse experiences. My career has enabled me to conduct epidemiology, serve in health system leadership and develop and implement policy. I particularly like to teach and have loved each opportunity and role. Second, network and seek opportunities. When I left military service after an illness, I wrote to each state health officer and state epidemiologist in 20 states and received several job offers. Career opportunity is all about getting your foot in the door and demonstrating the diversity of expertise and training a preventive medicine physician brings to the job or role.

What is the best advice you received that made a difference in your career decisions?

The best advice I received was from a senior mentor who told me to follow my heart in picking a new role, when one ended due to a reorganization. I had two offers in areas I was not interested in, and one in academia which I selected. Although the salary and benefits weren't as good as the other offers, it was the right choice as it suited my interest in teaching and worked out best in the long run.

From your point of view, what is the key benefit that a professional association such as ACPM can offer an individual?

Preventive Medicine is so diverse in practice, it truly helps to continue to connect with colleagues at meetings, annual conferences and in other ways in service to the College to learn what others are doing with their careers. ACPM has been very supportive in a personal way and educationally to me as well as professionally in co-developing training and certification for providers in military environmental exposure.