

# 2023 Candidate Statement – Candidate for Nominating Committee



**Ken Harwood, PT, PhD, FAPTA**

**Question:** What is your role as a member of the Nominating Committee to cultivate a pool of qualified potential candidates that inspires inclusive representation of a diverse membership?

**Response:**

As a long-time, active member of the American Physical Therapy Association, I have witnessed firsthand the importance and benefit of having diverse views from a variety of people of various backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, and cultures when working collaboratively on projects. In fact, I have participated in numerous projects with diverse groups of individuals with varying opinions and perspectives that resulted in amazing outcomes. It was the thoughtful discussion and negotiation of different views and outlooks that led to successful initiatives. An open mind, good listening skills, and the ability to negotiate are, I believe, among the basic skills of good leadership.

As a healthcare professional community, we must strive to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow us to meet people we serve where they are, understand their perspectives, and be sensitive to their lived experiences. Currently, we call this person-centered care, however, I believe it has always been part of who we are as physical therapists and physical therapist assistants. Hence, we must recognize the changing demographics of the United States and its relationship to the world, in order to affect change and achieve the best outcomes for our patients and ensure the future health of our association.

The APTA has recognized the importance of the tenets of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as they are firmly rooted in the foundation of our vision, mission, and strategic plan. It is therefore a fundamental responsibility of members and leaders of the association, to live up to the mission and vision and work toward achieving the objectives set out by our association. Although I believe that the Nominating Committee must adopt the tenets of diversity, inclusion, and equity in its work, it must be a component of a larger plan for the association. The goal of this plan is to achieve an organization and profession that reflects the people we serve, in all its diversity.

As a Nominating Committee member, it is incumbent upon the individual to be directed by the vision, mission, and strategic plan of the association which includes understanding and recognizing the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The nominating committee is obligated to develop a slate of candidates that is ready and able to assist the association in meeting the DEI objectives. In order to achieve this obligation, the nominating committee must assess the leadership acumen of the prospective candidates for national office. The skill sets required for leadership may change based on the current environmental context of the association however, the skills associated with embodying the tenets of DEI, including being open to different perspectives, valuing the experiences of the individual, and the ability to listen to different perspectives in a non-judgmental manner is a constant. These skills are assessed through the intentional design of interview questions, exploring personal experiences with the candidates, and observation of the candidates' prior behavior and actions.

One important tenet of DEI is to develop a welcoming environment for all participants. Although I believe the committee and House leaders have made important strides towards this goal, more can be done. As a longstanding academician and educator, I have witnessed numerous teaching and learning activities focused

on the development of leadership skills in students and new clinicians. Our future leaders must view our world using an inclusive lens that fosters justice, diversity, equity and inclusion. I have personally seen the impact these activities have had in the development of some amazing leaders. I recommend we now focus on identifying and guiding mid-career individuals, especially from underrepresented groups, who are readying themselves for leadership positions in the association. Specifically, the nominating committee should reach out to individuals from underrepresented groups, discuss their leadership plans, assist them in finding mentors, identify training to develop their skills, and provide them with needed resources. All potential leaders should obtain diversity, equity, and inclusion training that incorporates negotiating skills, and self-assessment and reflection activities of personal leadership abilities.

Patients, healthcare providers, and health-related stakeholders deserve to see physical therapists and physical therapist assistants that represent the individuals who are being served. It is my sincere hope that as we work together as an association toward the goals of DEI, we will be able to provide true patient-centered care and address societal needs with a better understanding of the needs of all the people we serve. The success of meeting the DEI objectives will have a significant impact on our journey as we strive to transform society by optimizing movement to improve human experiences.