



Dr. Richard Ricciardi PhD, CRNP, FAANP, FAAN is the American Association of Nurse Practitioners® (AANP) Region 3 Director. He is a professor and the director of strategic partnerships for the Center for Health Policy and Media Engagement at The George Washington University (GWU) School of Nursing. Prior to joining GWU, Dr. Ricciardi served as the director, division of practice improvement, and the senior advisor for nursing at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Dr. Ricciardi served on active duty in the Army for 31 years, where he held numerous positions as a pediatric nurse practitioner (PNP) and family nurse practitioner (FNP), clinical scientist and senior leader. In his last two assignments on active duty, Ricciardi served as chief of nursing research at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and director of research at the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury. In 2020, Ricciardi was recalled back to active duty to serve as the Medical Director for the COVID-19 pandemic screening, treatment and public health response at Fort Leonard Wood Missouri, one of the Department of Defense's largest training bases. Dr. Ricciardi has held numerous board-level positions on nonprofit associations and organizations. He is an excellent photographer and has captured many historic moments for AANP and FAANP. He introduced an Art and Creativity column to the *FAANP Forum* highlighting the artistic and creative dimension of Fellows.

### Interview Abstract

Dr. Ricciardi is a multitalented individual with many interests. He initially became a math teacher but at that time there were no jobs available. His sister was enrolled in a nursing program so he enrolled as well. His analytic brain often conflicted with the nurture aspect of nursing. His dean encouraged him to complete his program and his first job following graduation was in the Metropolitan Emergency Department in Manhattan. There he met a patient who was in the military and thought that he would serve 3 years. He ended up serving 31 years as he was brought back out of retirement to lead a Covid initiative for one year. During his tenure in the military he worked primarily in pediatric and adolescent units. He obtained an Army's certificate as a pediatric nurse practitioner and worked in several pediatric or adolescent clinics. After receiving his Master's degree from the University of Maryland, he was sent to southwest Germany where he provided pediatric health care for children of service members. He was then transferred to Landstuhl, Germany where he served as Chief nurse for 18 months. After returning

stateside, he was stationed at Fort Hood in multiple leadership capacities. He then taught at the Uniformed Services University (USU). He received a post master's certificate as an FNP while at USU. During his doctoral studies his interest in research gained momentum and studied the impact of body armor on the warfighters in combat, particularly females. As Chief Nurse of research at Walter Reed Army Hospital, he sifted his focus of research to the army's greatest need at that time, PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injuries, rehabilitation of the wounded and chronic pain. Through his research, he became interested in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). As Congress recognized the need for health services for returning military personnel, a new agency the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) and Dr. Ricciardi was appointed at Director of Research. In 2020, he reached the 30-year retirement mandate and retired at the rank of Colonel. He then served as the Director, Division of Practice Improvement and Senior Advisor for Nursing at AHRQ (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality). In 2020 he was recalled to the Army for one year to serve as Medical Director for the COVID 19 pandemic screening, treatment and public health response at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. He is currently on faculty at George Washington University. He is married with two children. Dr. Ricciardi is very humble and an excellent photographer. His presentations often contain his photography. He has been active in the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and is a Fellow. He is currently Region 3 Director and has served as FAANP treasurer. He highlights the art and creativity of AANP members through various media.

## Biographical Sketch

Richard Ricciardi is a Professor in the School of Nursing and the Executive Director for the Center for Health Policy and Media Engagement at George Washington University. Prior to joining GW, Dr. Ricciardi served as the Director, Division of Practice Improvement and Senior Advisor for Nursing at AHRQ. Dr. Ricciardi served on active duty in the US Army for 31 years, retiring as a Colonel. His interview outlines in detail his participation, involvement, and innovations during his military service. He received his BSN from SUNY Downstate, State University, New York. While in the military, he completed the Army's certificate program as a pediatric nurse practitioner in 1983. He was mentored by Dr. Henry Silver at the University of Colorado. He received his Master's degree from the University of Maryland. He taught at the Uniformed Services University and earned his post master's certificate as an FNP. He began his doctoral study at Catholic University of American but then enrolled in the first PhD program offered by Uniformed Services University. He Dr. Ricciardi is a past president of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing and a past president of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners. Dr. Ricciardi maintains a part-time clinical practice at Mercy Health Clinic; serving underserved populations.

Keywords: military, nurse practitioner, researcher, photography, holistic care

Richard “Ric” Ricciardi

Interview

AANP Oral History Project



Dr. Richard "Ric" Ricciardi PhD, CRNP, FAANP, FAAN

### Earning the BSN

Standing at the crossroads with a teaching degree in hand Richard Ricciardi "Ric" had visions of becoming a math teacher but could not find a teaching job. There would be no: "To Sir with Love" scripted life in Ric's future. With no job prospective on the horizon, he wasn't sure what the future would hold. So one morning contemplating what he would do for a living he pulled out the Sunday edition of the New York Times (at the Library) and thumbed through the "job wanted" section and noticed there were scores of jobs for nurses. It just so happened that his sister was in the process of applying to nursing school and she convinced Ric to apply. Ric was accepted and attended nursing school as one of only four males in a class of 154 students, his sister among one of the 150 female students in his class at SUNY Downstate, State University, New York.

Nursing school was no "cake walk" for males in the late 1970s. While he did well on exams and in clinicals, his recollection was one of "not fitting in" with the nurses with whom he worked and studied in the hospitals. He recounts that he approached things from a scientific perspective and his analytical mindset did not bode well in an environment where nurture frequently trumped science. On the verge of leaving nursing school convinced nursing wasn't for him, he met with his Dean to discuss his predicament and an exit plan. Somehow telling him the only way out of the nursing program was to fail because she was not going to approve his voluntary departure motivated him to continue. Ric graduated in 1980; with his BSN degree in hand he was positioned for and did engage in a serendipitous string of career opportunities.

## Early Career

His first post-graduation nursing experience was in an emergency room at Metropolitan Hospital in Manhattan; he recounts meeting a patient who was in the army. Their conversation peaked his interest about a career in the military services so he visited a recruiter with the intention of serving a three-year tour and possibly going to medical school. Instead he remained in nursing and retired thirty years later as a colonel from the U.S. Army. Over the course of his thirty years in the military he began as a labor and delivery and a neonatal intensive care nurse for a short period of time. Completing the Army's certificate program as a pediatric nurse practitioner in 1983 he was assigned to the general pediatric outpatient clinic at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Denver, Colorado. While there he met and was mentored by Dr. Henry Silver, the pediatrician along with Dr. Loretta Ford credited with starting the first nurse practitioner program. Ric states that those early teaching encounters with Dr. Silver shaped his clinical practice for a lifetime and he continues to be influenced by many "Henryisms". For example, before entering an exam room a 'Henryism' is: "Ric before you enter the exam room clear your mind and approach each patient as you would want your child, sister, brother, mother, father, etc... to be approached and treated -- as if they were in the exam room," a motto that he lives by to this day. Ric recounts that Henry loved to teach and share his vast and pragmatic expertise and touted the history and the patient-clinician relationship as the two most important aspects of the patient encounter.

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Ric was transferred from Fitzsimons to Fort Meade, Maryland, to work in a general pediatric clinic, serving children from birth to adolescence. He got involved in precepting nurse practitioner students from the University of Maryland and eventually entered that institution as a student to complete his MSN degree. While a master's student he completed his clinical practicum at John Hopkins Hospital in the Harriet Lane Clinic and Adolescent Clinic where he saw teens and young adults. He felt his clinical practicum there was a tremendous experience since the patients were in the same demographic age group as many of the military personnel. His many connections during his practicum at Hopkins served him well as it eventually led to part-time employment and his running the newborn nursery as a pediatric nurse practitioner two weekends per month.

With his MSN degree completed he found himself in southwest Germany to provide health care services to the 10<sup>th</sup> Ordinance Brigade, which equated to approximately 10,000 service members and their families, about 1,700 were children. During his tenure he was promoted to Major and functioned as the chief nurse for the 18 months he served. In 1992 he was relocated to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, where he consolidated all of the primary care resources from the surrounding areas and moved them to Landstuhl where he established the first primary care clinic at this military facility.

In 1994 he found himself headed stateside with new orders to report to Fort Hood, Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center, the largest army base in the U.S. and the second largest U.S. military base. While there he started an adolescent clinic and eventually he became the Clinic Director for a large primary care clinic. As the first nurse in this role, he found himself at that time in history, in an atypical role of evaluating, and supervising the physician staff. During the Bosnian civil war Ric deployed with the 21<sup>st</sup> Combat Support Hospital as the chief of the

emergency medical treatment department for six months and while there set up a hospital. He was transferred back to Fort Hood to serve as the Chief of Primary Care for a short period of time.

Leaving Fort Hood he became an assistant professor at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) to teach in the Graduate School of Nursing, FNP program. While at USU Ric developed a humanitarian assistance course for advanced practice nurses, which was in concert with military diplomacy during peacetime. His academic endeavors afforded him many opportunities, working with a great staff and being mentored by a great leader, Dr. Pat McMullen, FAANP. While serving at USU, he received numerous honors, including the USU outstanding faculty award. While serving as faculty at USU, he also earned his post-master's certificate as a family nurse practitioner (FNP).

Leaving USU, Ric was assigned as Chief of Primary Care at Kimbrough Ambulatory Care Center at Fort Meade, Maryland. Just around the same time he started working on his PhD degree at The Catholic University of America (CUA). Serendipitously, at the same time he was enrolled at CUA Senator Inouye (a strong supporter of nurses) sponsored a bill to fund a PhD program at the USU for nursing. Ric applied and was accepted as one of the first ten doctorate students in the new PhD program and it was also around the same time that he was selected for a promotion to colonel.

## Research

His interest in research gained momentum when looking at the impact of body armor on the warfighter in combat. An area not researched in the past, his dissertation drew great attention when the findings were released. To understand the impact of this investigation one must know that the military warfighter's standard personal protective gear consists of a helmet, body armor with a chest plate in the front and back, and a weapon and often exceeds 50kg of weight. This additional weight has a tremendous impact on the ability of the warfighter to perform in combat.

Ric sampled women (because the influence of gender on physical performance in stressful combat situations with body armor was an unknown) wanting to know what was the tipping point of body armor and physical performance under combat conditions. From a physiologic standpoint, Ric found men and women performed equally well (same physiologic costs) when placed under simulated military operational conditions. He continued his research in the area of physical performance/physical readiness that landed him the position of Chief of Nursing Research Service at Walter Reed Army Medical Center from 2006 to 2009. This was a tremendous responsibility as he oversaw research during wartime in the Department of Defense's busiest and largest hospital caring for the war wounded. While he loved being involved in human performance research he found himself shifting his research focus to areas of greatest need during a time of war; such as PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), rehabilitation of the war wounded and chronic pain. These new areas of research led him to study CAM therapies (i.e., mind-body techniques, acupuncture and acupressure therapies); to address the role and effect of integrative medicine to meet the health needs of military personnel wounded in combat. His research team's CAM research findings led to the opening of a wellness clinic at Walter Reed Army Medical Center that afforded military personnel and hospital staff the opportunity to receive integrative medicine therapies.

The increasing awareness of the health needs of our military personnel returning from combat gained Congress' attention as the war continued. A new agency, the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE), was formed and Ric found himself at the helm of this newly formed agency as the Director of Research. While in this position he oversaw millions of dollars of congressionally funded research on PTSD and TBI. It was at DCoE that Ric reached the 30-year mandatory active duty retirement mark, and in 2010 he retired from the US Army.

### Post Military Retirement

Still young and having many options available to him, he found himself at another crossroad in his life. Wondering what was in-store for him next, he found himself interviewing for a position at AHRQ; the job was with the Center for Primary Care and with his interest in health promotion he was a natural contender. In December 2010 he started in this position as a health services researcher and clinical scientist. Still employed at AHRQ, he is currently working on building health service delivery models to strengthen interprofessional teams and team-based care, with a particular focus in primary care. He is also working on measuring the effectiveness/efficiency of team-based care and models of care and interventions to improve the care of populations with multiple chronic conditions.

When asked what was in the future for him, Ric responded; "I don't know, but I have given this some thought and am open to what comes next". He recounts that most of what he did professionally, specifically the opportunities available to him occurred serendipitously so he thinks his next adventure will occur in the same way. "I owe much to my wife, daughter and son and to my military and civilian friends and colleagues who have added so much to my life. I am grateful for all the opportunities that I have been given and hope that in some small way my contributions added to the health and welfare of the populations that I have served." Being born to first generation immigrant parents from Italy he recollects loving his life growing up in New York City. He recalls that strong family values and a robust work ethic helped to shape who he is today. Working to make this world a better place personifies the life of Dr. Richard Ricciardi.

**\*\*Dr. Richard Ricciardi is a former Treasurer of FAANP and the Volunteer official photographer for FAANP. Thank you, Ric, for your services and for the many fine photos.**

### Additional Information:

#### Faculty Distinctions

- Fellow Ad Eundem Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland
- Fellow American Academy of Nursing
- Fellow American Association of Nurse Practitioners

#### Honors and Awards

- NIH Directors Award for contributions to the Interagency Pain Research Coordinating Committee, and authoring of the National Pain Strategy (2015)

- RADM Julia R. Plotnick Publication Award for Health/Nursing Policy; Publication in 2014: A conceptual model of the role of complexity in the care of patients with multiple chronic conditions. Medical Care, 52 Suppl 3, S7-S14. (2015)
- Fellow, American Academy of Nursing (2013)
- Editor's Award for the most highly cited manuscript in the journal from 2007-2010: Publication in 2007: Use of bioelectrical impedance analysis in the evaluation, treatment, and prevention of overweight and obesity. Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, 19(5), 235-241. (2011)
- Excellence in Nursing Research Award, Military Health System Conference, for research and policy implications on the impact of body armor on the physical performance of military personnel in simulated combat conditions (2008)
- Fellow, American Association of Nurse Practitioner (2007)
- Outstanding Research Podium Presentation, American Academy of Nurse Practitioners National Conference; Indianapolis, Indiana (2007)
- Board of Regents Award, Uniformed Services University of the Health Science (2006)
- Distinguished Ph.D. Graduate, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and recipient of the Military Officers Association of America Outstanding Student Award (2006)
- Awarded the "9A" designator by the United States Army Medical Department. This is the highest professional award granted by the United States Army Medical Department and the Army Nurse Corps (2004)
- Outstanding Uniformed Faculty Member Award, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Graduate School of Nursing (2001)
- Outstanding Nurse, Landstuhl Army Medical Center (1993)

#### Professional Affiliations

- American Nurses Association
  - American Academy of Nursing
  - National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
  - American Association of Nurse Practitioners
  - Military Officers Association of America
  - Sigma Theta Tau International
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