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ACPM NEWS

ACPM Member Spotlight: Michele A. Soltis, MD, MPH, FACPM

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Members of the American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM) are exceptional professionals and leaders working across all sectors of the healthcare ecosystem. ACPM proudly highlights the impactful work, wide-ranging career paths, and diverse professional specialties of our members through ACPM Member Spotlights. Featured articles dive into the opportunities within preventive medicine, how experts discovered the specialty, and how the training enhanced their career.

Dr. Michele A. Soltis retired from the U.S. Army in September 2024 after 22 years of service. During her career as an Army preventive medicine physician, she had the privilege to serve as the Chief Consultant to the Army Surgeon General, Director of the Public Health Directorate in the Office of the Army Surgeon General, Program Director of the Public Health Residency Program at Madigan Army Medical Center, Associate Program Director of the General Preventive Medicine Residency Program at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, and Preventive Medicine Officer with the 10th Mountain Division in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

As the Public Health Emergency Officer for the Army Medical Command, Preventive Medicine Specialty Consultant to the Army Surgeon General, and Chairperson of the Joint Preventive Medicine Policy Group for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs (Health Readiness Policy and Oversight), Dr. Soltis promoted force health protection initiatives while optimizing public health and readiness efforts. Since retiring from the military, Dr. Soltis is honored to continue to serve Veterans as the Deputy Chief Consultant for the Health Outcomes Military Exposures team at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE SPECIALTY OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE?

Although I did consider pursuing training in other specialties, it was the tremendous scope of Preventive

Medicine that captured my interest. As a medical student, I was afforded the opportunity to complete a rotation in Preventive Medicine at Madigan Army Medical Center. It was during that rotation that I first became enamored with the choose-your-own-adventure nature of the specialty. I came to understand and appreciate that there are few (if any) other medical specialties that train and encourage their practitioners to not only engage in direct patient care but to also participate in important research, teaching, and other academic endeavors as well as to manage programs, inform policies, and lead health systems in efforts to protect and promote the safety and well-being of populations. I am always excited to learn of new ways in which Preventive Medicine physicians can employ interdisciplinary approaches to proactively impact the health of both individuals and their communities.



Michele A. Soltis

HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO MAXIMIZE YOUR MILITARY SERVICE AND BECOME TRAINED IN PREVENTIVE MEDICINE?

I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to train as an Army Preventive Medicine physician. While practicing Preventive Medicine in the military and caring for our Service members and their Families, I was challenged to learn about and become facile in many unique aspects of the specialty. Training as an Army Preventive Medicine physician taught me to conduct medical threat analyses of locations to which Soldiers

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deploy, to understand the impacts of and how to prevent select tropical infectious diseases, to mitigate the spread of communicable illnesses of public health importance in various congregate settings, and how to approach conditions and situations that other practitioners might only have read about in textbooks. I treasure the extraordinary education that I received and am most thankful for the meaningful mentorship from incredible teachers, physicians, and officers.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY OF YOUR MILITARY SERVICE?

Although I have many fond memories and have only served in great places and with truly remarkable people, my favorite memories are of the time I spent deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. I was afforded the privilege to serve our Service members in austere conditions, encounter public health challenges that I had not had the opportunity to contemplate in garrison, and better appreciate both the conveniences that we enjoy and the freedoms that we take for granted each day. I also had the pleasure of working with many incredible colleagues who taught me so much about medicine and the military and not only became my lifelong friends but my chosen family.

HOW HAS YOUR TRAINING AND SERVICE IN MILITARY PREVENTIVE MEDICINE IMPACTED YOUR WORK IN CARING FOR VETERANS?

I hope my experiences practicing military Preventive Medicine and working with Service members and their Families will help me to better understand the places where and circumstances in which Veterans have served and sacrificed so much. In my work with the Veterans Health Administration Health Outcomes Military Exposures team, I endeavor each day to become a more empathetic provider and to ensure that our Veterans receive the compassionate, comprehensive care that they have earned and deserve.

WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU RECEIVED THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR CAREER DECISION?

The best guidance that I received was from those who advised me to renounce my fears and doubts, leave my comfort zone, try new experiences, and ultimately pursue

my passion. By seeking out and delving into a different rotation experience, one that none of my medical school classmates had tried, I discovered the specialty of Preventive Medicine and never looked back. I was fortunate to find an area of medicine that excited me and that I could readily envision practicing for decades to come. Mrs. Gump would likely agree that Preventive Medicine is “like a box of chocolates – you never know what you’re going to get.” Each day has the potential to be different and unpredictable. That anticipation, that unknown, is what continues to pique my interest and stoke my passion for the practice of Preventive Medicine.

FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW, WHAT IS THE KEY BENEFIT THAT A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION SUCH AS AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE CAN OFFER AN INDIVIDUAL?

The ACPM offers Preventive Medicine physicians a professional home and a special sense of camaraderie. ACPM is where Preventive Medicine physicians can enhance their professional performance, share ideas and best practices, and advocate for Preventive Medicine with like-minded physicians who understand the nuances of the specialty and the knowledge, skills, and abilities demanded of its practitioners. ACPM helps Preventive Medicine physicians communicate their credibility and showcase their competence both to other healthcare providers and to the public whose health the Preventive Medicine community endeavors to protect.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER YOUNG PHYSICIANS WHO ARE BEGINNING THEIR JOURNEY IN MEDICINE?

To those students and physicians beginning their journey in medicine, I would offer that you should explore the less-traveled paths and find an area of medicine that both excites you now and in which you can imagine growing in year after year after year. Cultivate your curiosity, be proactive in your education, always stay current in your knowledge, and work to expand and evolve in your practice. Nurture your need and desire for life-long discovery and, most importantly, allow yourself to learn from everyone and in every experience. Oftentimes the best, most meaningful lessons are taught in the most unexpected circumstances.