



From Where I Stand

Alyssa Schmidt
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PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH



Board members Joseph Rad, PA-C and Alyssa Schmidt, PA-C with their plus ones.

Since I moved to Salem in 2017, Marion-Polk Medical Society has hosted speakers and networking events that helped me grow as a new provider. Provider wellness has been the theme of most of our medical society events since I joined. This summer, after the hardest year of most of our careers, we decided to practice what we preach. We incorporated new events to encourage exercise and fun.

In July, we hosted our first event since the COVID pandemic started. We met at Turner Lake for a paddleboard day. Yes, we met on the 115° F day. Never did I think I would trade in my basketball shoes for wet shoes. The water felt refreshing, and I picked up my new summer hobby. Paddleboarding proved much more difficult than I thought! A mix of experienced and new paddleboarders combined to make the perfect recipe for a great summer adventure. This event provided laughter and fun in the outdoors—important keys to self-care. After a year of social distancing, it was awesome spending time with other providers learning a new activity.

Then on August 5th, the Marion Polk County Medical Society sponsored Dancing Date Night at Tap Root Old Mill. Dr. Hotan, from Aumsville Medical Clinic, showed us that you are never too old to learn how to Merengue! We had providers young and old, retired and new, join us for our second event. With the concerns of the Delta variant in our community, we held the event outside on the lawn. We danced the night away with wine, charcuterie, and fearless spirits.

As providers, we tell every patient about the importance of daily exercise, but do we take our own advice? Exercise releases endorphins to help improve our moods and reduce stress. It is more important than ever that we, as providers, embrace exercise. I hope you will join us at our next activity!

Do you have ideas for future events? Please let us know! [f](#)



Instructors Tanie Hotan and Mark Lowes showing how it's really done.



Praxis PA Christine Rue and husband on date night.



BY NANCY BOUTIN, MD

Ultrarunner: Pam Smith, MD

Let's get one thing clear right out of the gate: Pam Smith, long-time Salem hematopathologist, is an honest-to-goodness, international, elite athlete who sets world records and wins big races, including the Western States 100 (mile) in 2013. If you only know Dr. Smith from Tumor Board or sharing a two-headed microscope over a difficult case, you might find that surprising. Unfailingly helpful, pleasant, and unassuming as she is, you might have a hard time picturing her, one Thanksgiving, running a little shy of eight hours in the middle of the night along the Arabian Sea representing the U.S. in Doha, Qatar, as part of the 100 kilometer World Championships. The women's team took third and Smith had a tenth place finish. Did I mention the *world* championships?

Smith, who says she doesn't think she "was blessed with a huge amount of natural talent," credits her success to a strong work ethic and that she loves to "figure things out." She has, however, enough natural talent that she came in first

the first time she did the mile run at middle school, the first time she ever ran five kilometers, and qualified for Boston with her first marathon—for which, she admits, she didn't really train "appropriately." Her longest "training run" had been only nine miles.

She didn't run Boston that year--Smith's parents took the family to Mexico to celebrate her medical school graduation instead. She spent ten years trying to improve on the PR she set qualifying at the Washington's Birthday Marathon in Greenbelt, Maryland. Smith says she realized she had obsessed over beating her first finish time and didn't think that was good for her. The wisdom, she says, is that if you want to progress as a runner you can either go faster or longer. Turns out, her forte was to go longer—a lot longer. And, when she trained for those longer distances, she got faster and the old PR fell.

"By definition," she explains, "an ultramarathon is anything longer than 26.2 miles, whether on the road or on trails. Most ultrarunners specialize in one or the other, but I like both. Many people think that all long distances are the same, but when you double the mileage, there are a lot more factors to contend with."

When Smith decided to abandon marathons and take up trail running, there just happened to be a fifty kilometer trail run coming up along the Mackenzie River. She figured 50k was only five miles longer than a marathon, so it should be a piece of cake. She went in with no expectations of the experience or herself and had a blast. The scenery was beautiful and the people were great. A group from Corvallis introduced themselves. "They said, 'You should come around with us. We can do more—let's all do more.' So I said, 'Sure, I want to do more.' Just what I needed—a bunch of enablers," she says with a laugh.

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ULTRARUNNER

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Although Smith does run some 50k races, she really excels at 100k—62 miles and a skosh—which she runs in around eight hours, and also 24 hour runs. Smith qualified for the 2021 U.S. National 24 Hour team when she racked up 153.041 miles in the World Championships in Albi, France, in 2019. Unfortunately, due to COVID, the October Championship race in Romania has been canceled, as were the 2020 Worlds. “Which means,” she says, “everyone is going to have to qualify again. They were nice about it, but I thought the pain of re-qualifying sounded terrible. I guess with experience there is knowledge. It’s going to be very painful.”

That said, she has chosen to run the Badwater 135 in Death Valley. The race is 10% shorter than her total distance in France, but many times more grueling than a flat course in Europe, with provisions, port-a-potties, and, it appears from the Irun4Ultra YouTube, massage therapists on the in-field.

“The race goes from Badwater basin, which is minus 282 feet, up to the Mount Whitney portal at 9,870 feet. It’s 135 miles and they conveniently make this race in July. And, I also did it on the record hottest year that they’ve ever had there, a 127-degree high. There is no shade anywhere because nothing grows in Death Valley. The thing that’s interesting about the race is that you’re running on the road and your crew is in a car, so they can stop anywhere, which is nice because you have assistance, but you also have an out. You can jump in that car anytime you think things are getting bad. So there’s a mental game that you have to play, ‘I’m going to keep going.’ The pavement temperature hit 160 degrees, hot enough to melt the glue in my shoes. The sole of one of them completely detached.

“Having a crew car requires another level of strategy. You’re left to figure out when you want your crew to show up and what they are going to have in the car and what are they going to do with you, and so on. Most other races dictate that to you—there’s going to be a crew station every five miles, for example.

“With the 24 hour races, the mental game is different. If you sit for a few minutes, it’s less time you have to put out the energy, but it’s also less ground covered. At the end of the day, you’re going to be exactly where you started. Because you’re running in a loop, you see everybody on the course frequently. There tends to be a stronger sense of camaraderie. You know, misery loves company. Everybody’s out there suffering together--the people who are running slower or faster, walking, or whatever, they all kind of cross paths multiple times throughout the day. You’re never more than a mile from whatever you need, so you have to push through the demons telling you, ‘Stop. This is stupid. It doesn’t mean anything.’ Those demons grow bigger and stronger as time goes on.”

One thing that doesn’t bother Smith on the overnight runs is the need for sleep. She says that she doesn’t get sleepy as long as she’s moving. If she slows down and gets cold, that’s when she has a hard time. And, she says, after a run like that, she actually has a difficult time getting to sleep. She’ll end up reading a book, fully



The U.S. team on the podium in Qatar.

clothed, in the hotel bathtub while her husband, who has been up to support her, sleeps in the bed. An ultrarunner himself--until a knee injury ended the long runs--he understands.

So far, nothing about ultrarunning sounds very appealing. But Smith said if she had to be the kind of runner who goes out for a few miles a day, she wouldn’t run at all. For her, the payoff comes in many different ways.

“I like the training plan—figuring out the best physiologic approach for my body and the kind of running I want to do. I like having a goal. I like the discipline. I like being an athlete. I love being out on the trails. I love being out there with my friend group. Going out for three hours on a Saturday morning is the same thing as other people going out on Friday night. We talk, we laugh, and when I get home, I feel like I’ve done something. I feel good. I don’t get a runner’s high, I get a runner’s mellow. It de-stresses me and gets rid of anxiety. I can let things go instead of focusing on what happened at work or whatever. At my core, I’m a very competitive person. Not so much with other people, but with myself and what I think I can do.

“I love figuring out how I’m going to do better at a race, how to pace, where to walk, what to eat. I need to decide where to have drop bags, what supplies to take, what gear to use, which shoes, all of that. Managing the details is a skill and that’s where I really excel. It’s a challenge and it’s fun.”

This summer Smith crewed for a friend running the Badwater 135. She had insights and strategy to share, plus a car to drive, and making sure the runner had everything he needed to keep the demons at bay. She even tidied Death Valley along the way, picking up non-race trash for proper disposal.

Although Smith is dedicated to her sport, she has plenty of other interests to keep her well-rounded. As with many parents of teenagers these days, she’s gotten good managing a socially-distanced high school experience. Her husband is a teacher, so they have juggled everyone’s video conferencing needs. She enjoys cooking with home-grown produce from her garden and eggs from her chickens. She adopted a neighbor’s goats and a “rescue” long-haired sheep. She’s mentoring younger ultrarunners. She’s busy enjoying all the outdoor activities the West has to offer.

Sounds like a summer of rest and recharging compared to her usual training schedule. Just wait until they announce the location of the 2022 World Championships. . . [+](#)

WOMEN WHO RUN

BY NANCY BOUTIN, MD

While Pam Smith may be the only woman ultrarunner in our medical community, three other women marathon runners turned up in our sweep of athletes. They have some differences and some commonalities in why and how they took up long-distance running. Gloria Marlowe, KP surgeon, Cheryl MacDonald, WVH medical director, and Tanie Hotan, Santiam family medicine doc, all find physical and mental renewal out on the road.

MacDonald grew up in a farming community in southwest Michigan and says she and her siblings were “always outside, running everywhere.” In high school, the PE teacher tagged some girls as sprinters and assigned others to distance. MacDonald pulled the long straw and ran the cross country route. She tried to collapse when she got back to the teacher. “Oh no,” he said, “You’ve got the second half of the workout still to do.” When she got home and sprawled out on the floor, her mother told her this was obviously too hard and that she should quit immediately. “That’s not a word in my vocabulary,” MacDonald says. “It just cemented my resolve.”

Marlowe took up running in high school in Nebraska to combat the effects of the American diet. MacDonald competed with the boys’ track team because her district hadn’t caught up with the 20th

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Gloria Marlowe in her Boston marathon bib.



Tanie Hotan and friends practicing patriotism, gratitude, and camaraderie on the road.

WOMEN WHO RUN

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century. Hotan started running as an adult after she volunteered at an event to support one of her kids' teachers and met Susan Gallagher of Gallagher's Fitness. She selected a race, bought some shoes, and found a whole bunch of new friends.

For each woman, more serious running grew out of the social opportunity they found in a community of like-minded individuals. They liked the way they felt after a run. They liked having something to do with fitness-focused peers. They liked the post-run socializing. But at some point, each got the idea she should sign up for a marathon, preferably one of the big ones—Boston, New York, Chicago, or the Marine Corp Marathon in Washington, D.C. Hotan trained with the Gallagher group and an older, more seasoned friend. Marlowe found an on-line training guide and went it alone. MacDonald, who had been entering short fun-runs and races, waited until she was post-partum with her second child to start adding longer miles to her workout.

MacDonald went across the lake and ran Chicago when her son hit 18 months. She loved running through the ethnic neighborhoods and seeing how each one highlighted a different aspect of their culture. Marlowe's first marathon took her through the streets of D.C., past the Pentagon, the National Mall, and the Capitol. She remembers being in awe of all of it. Hotan had a different experience. In 2014, the entrants to the Boston Marathon ran under heavy security out of fear of a copycat attack after the carnage of the year before. "There was militia on top of the buildings, up there with their rifles, basically protecting us."

The '13 bombing had drawn Hotan into running a marathon. She felt personally affronted that someone had attacked "her" community. She needed to make a statement, to go back to the site, as a way to say, "I'm not going to let you take this away from us." She realized she probably didn't have the speed to qualify yet and looking for her plan B, she found a backdoor into the race. She discovered that people who register and raise money for a qualified marathon charity can earn their golden ticket. She chose a charity that combats childhood obesity and raised over \$5000.

Somewhere around 20-23 miles into the races, each woman has hit the proverbial wall. MacDonald recalls, "After the first one, you say, 'I'll never do that again.' And then I did it nine more times." Marlowe drew inspiration from the war memorials to "all these young kids who went through so much more than what we're doing as runners." Hotan sucked it up when a woman stepped out of the crowd to run the last couple of miles to the finish line with two running prostheses where her legs should be—necessitated by injuries sustained at the bombing one year before.



Cheryl MacDonald and husband, Tom Armstrong, on top of the world.

MacDonald experienced a similar moment during her last marathon—the 2001 Marine Corps Marathon held six weeks after 9/11. She didn't think she would be able to attend, "but at the last moment, they said they were opening back up and I flew into Reagan Airport the first day they let planes in," she says. "The security was unbelievable. The Capitol was, of course, fenced off and there were so many guards everywhere. The Pentagon was still just devastated, a war zone. I ran my slowest time ever, but it seemed so much more to me because the whole spirit of the place was about people coming together as a country. Runners from New York wore the numbers or the faces of people who died. And when we ran by the Pentagon, everyone just stopped and stood there, universally. Usually, you worry about your time and passing everybody. And in this race, it just seems like nobody really worried about their time. Everybody just wanted to be present in that moment and kind of feel what this meant to us."

Community, challenge, effort, goals. For these women who run, the marathon serves as a metaphor for the work they do every day. The shorter races bring out their competitive sides. But at 26.2 miles, each of the three said they don't expect to stand on the podium and that lets them release the stress of competitiveness. Instead, they're able to be present in the moment, to find their limit, and then push through it to the finish line. 