Ten years ago, Katherine C. Nordal, PhD, made a major career change, transitioning from a 28-year-long practice in Vicksburg, Mississippi, to Washington, DC, to become executive director for professional practice at the American Psychological Association and APA Practice Organization. As with many of her colleagues, Nordal chose a career path in psychology to help improve peoples’ lives. But throughout her career, she learned that psychologists had to advocate for themselves to effectively serve their patients.

When she started out as a practitioner, the health care system was very different, and competition from an array of mental health providers hardly existed. By the time she arrived at APA in a new role, psychologists were facing a very different marketplace. Never afraid of a challenge, Nordal was energized and eager to advocate for psychologists and sought out opportunities to help advance practicing psychology and secure a future for the profession. She cultivated relationships with key stakeholders in Congress, state legislations, federal agencies, psychology licensing boards and the insurance industry.

During her tenure as executive director, Nordal ardently advocated for psychologists and their patients, spearheading efforts on an array of legislative, regulatory and legal issues including:

- Regulatory implementation of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act enacted into law in 2008, including submission of comments and meetings with federal agencies that led to a stronger final parity rule
- Passage of the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act of 2009 to create a national network of electronic health records
- Class action litigation and regulatory complaints against insurers for inappropriate and non-parity reimbursement practices
- Passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act in 2010
- Transfer of the Psychology PAC into the APA Practice Organization in 2012
- Establishment of a quality reporting registry for psychologists in 2014 and expanding it to a Qualified Clinical Data Registry in 2017
- Passage of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015
- Passage of Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2016
- Training and resources on innovative practice models to help psychologists interested in better adapting to a changing health care environment
- Relationship-building with insurance companies, resulting in the Practice Organization’s ability to rapidly solve many members’ billing and reimbursement problems, including an insurer’s dismissal of a vendor for abusive audit practices, and members’ ability to develop beneficial collaborations with insurers
- Expanding psychology’s role in Medicaid in numerous states nationwide
- Actively collaborating with APA offices including working jointly with the Science Directorate on Clinical Practice Guidelines and teaming up with the Education Directorates to develop a DC Medicaid Pilot Project using interns and post-docs to integrate care in underserved areas.

Nordal was also a compassionate boss and colleague who created a positive work environment and collegial atmosphere. As she prepares to retire in spring 2018, APA and state psychological association leaders and staff look back on her tenure as executive director for professional practice.

KATHERINE C. NORDAL, PHD
CELEBRATING A COMPASSIONATE LEADER AND STRONG ADVOCATE FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

By Luana Bossolo

“Her best asset is that Katherine brings people together who have diverse perspectives to achieve consensus in solving problems and challenges.”

– Antonio E. Puente, PhD
“I have known Katherine for years, and have seen her service to APA and the APAPO, both as a member of governance and the Executive Management Group. I have personally observed her commitment to APA, the practice of psychology and the profession in both roles. Her energy, ability to listen, kind and gentle spirit, and knowledge of the various aspects of the profession will definitely be missed. Katherine, thank you for your service to APA and the APAPO.”

– Jennifer F. Kelly, PhD, Secretary, APA Board of Directors

“Katherine Nordal, over the 35-plus years I’ve known her, has consistently elevated not only the profession of psychology, but also the psychologists within our profession. She was one of the pioneers of successful independent practice in Mississippi, and then and since, has been a treasured role model, dogged advocate, dedicated doer, uplifting motivator, bold spokesperson, and fun and enjoyable friend and colleague to many. Her strengths and successes will continue to benefit us for quite some time. As a profession we have profited mightily from who Katherine is and what she has done; as an individual, I have been blessed to learn from and to know her. Gratitude abounds.”

– Jana Martin, PhD, CEO of The Trust

“Her best asset is that Katherine brings people together who have diverse perspectives to achieve consensus in solving problems and challenges. Despite many challenging issues, and sometimes personalities, her continued focusing on furthering professional psychology attest to her tenacity and impact.”

– Antonio E. Puente, PhD, 2017 President, American Psychological Association

“Katherine Nordal’s professional accomplishments for practice have been innumerable and can be easily seen by looking through the APA and the Practice Organization websites or her CV. As CAPP chair, what I’ve most appreciated about Katherine is her leadership style which continues to inspire, motivate and excite the diverse practice constituencies about the future vision for practicing psychologists. Katherine’s communication style not only builds relationships across a wide range of constituencies, but she also clearly articulates the message and defends and challenges ideas and strategies to assure decisions are inclusive, impactful and the best fit for practitioners.”

– Kate Brown, PhD, Chair, Committee for the Advancement of Professional Practice (CAPP) from 2015 to 2017

“Katherine’s many years as a practitioner on the front lines gave her a deeper understanding of the concerns of her constituents and fueled the passion she brought to the job every single day. Katherine was the perfect mix for the job – an unwavering champion for practice, but also someone who ‘played well with others’ and knew how to achieve her goals through collaboration.”

– Nancy Gordon Moore, PhD MBA, Executive Director, Strategic Programs, American Psychological Association

“Katherine Nordal played a key role in breaking down silos within APA and the discipline. She worked with others in the science and education sectors to strengthen the effectiveness and status of psychological practice. In doing so, she serves as a model for her colleagues and for those who will come after her.”

– Howard Kurtzman, PhD, Acting Executive Director, APA Science Directorate

“As a full-time practitioner who went on to do a Congressional Fellowship, Katherine is a role model to all psychologists who care about the future of the field. Her service in numerous APA governance roles combined with her practice background prepared her well to meet the challenge of being the Executive Director for Professional Practice for APA and the Practice Organization.”

– Dan Abrahamson, PhD, Associate Executive Director, APA

“Before coming to the Practice Organization Katherine was active in her state association and was an advocate for the issues faced by private practitioners. Becoming the Executive Director of the APA Practice Organization was a natural progression in Katherine’s quest to promote and advocate for psychology. She has been a fearless leader, has taken on the tough challenges of the last decade with gusto, and has always had the good of the profession, and the people psychologists serve, at the forefront of her thinking. She has been an advocate for SPTAs and the important role they play in the profession. Thank you, Katherine, for all you have done and all you have meant to psychology.”

– Sally Cameron, Executive Director, North Carolina Psychological Association

“Katherine has been the right person to guide the Practice Directorate and the Practice Organization over the past ten years. She built great collegiality amongst the staff and supported their professional development so that Practice has been able to fight for psychologists and continue to ensure that those we serve have access to quality, informed psychological services.”

– Lynn F. Bufka, PhD, Associate Executive Director, Practice Research and Policy, American Psychological Association