MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF WPA

On the Road to the Prague World Congress of Psychiatry

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

As we move forward towards the XIV World Congress of Psychiatry as the most important event of the present triennium, I would like to touch on some key achievements and tasks. These include the recently completed WPA General Survey organized by our Secretary General, the preparation of documents and action items for the General Assembly, and programmatic progress for the World Congress itself.

The WPA General Survey

The General Survey of the World Psychiatric Association for the 2005-2008 period responds to the normative requirements established in the Manual of Procedures and to the objective of advancing the institutional strength of WPA through a democratic process of consultation that looks for critical and constructive viewpoints and suggestions from all components of our Association.

The 2005-2008 General Survey questionnaire covers the principal areas of WPA works, as follows: WPA purposes, needs of WPA components, Secretariat activities, zonal structure and activities, WPA external visibility, educational activities, Sections, meetings, publications, consensus statements, finances, and ethics. To be noted, the similarity in structure between the present questionnaire and those of the 1996-1999, 1999-2002, and 2002-2005 Surveys has allowed the evaluation of WPA performance across these four periods of institutional governance.

The General Survey Report (soon to be posted on the WPA Online) was elaborated on the basis of all 156 questionnaires received by April 2008 from Member Societies, Sections and other WPA components. The results of the analyses of the questionnaires received are presented in the full Report through a set of statistical tables prepared from semi-quantitative evaluative ratings and from categorizable textual suggestions produced by all respondents, and through a transcription of narrative comments.

With respect to the fulfillment of WPA purposes, almost all of them received substantial ratings and, as in the 2004 Survey, these were consistently higher than those in 2000 and even more strongly higher than those in 1997.

Quite noteworthy is the perceived performance of the WPA Secretariat, which received 80% ratings as either “excellent” or “good”. The usefulness of WPA News was rated as “very” or “moderately useful” by 87% of the respondents and the quality of WPA Website as “good” or “excellent” by 79% of them. WPA Zonal structure and activities are over the years achieving increasingly substantial performance ratings.

Concerning major sectoral activities, highest ratings were obtained by the publication of World Psychiatry and then by the general impact of our publications as well as by our educational programs. The
performance of our Scientific Sections and our Scientific Meetings were perceived as gradually growing over earlier triennia.

With respect to ethical standards and activities, the quality of the WPA Declaration of Madrid on Ethical Guidelines for Psychiatric Practice and its additional Specific Guidelines obtained 81% ratings as good or excellent, a figure that consistently has grown over preceding periods. Some encouraging growth in perceived quality was also noted concerning Consensus Statements.

The results highlighted above reveal the increasing progress achieved by WPA in the fulfillment of its statutory purposes over the course of four trienniums. Also remarkable are the advances obtained in a whole range of institutional activities, including areas that earlier exhibited some limitations.

Preparing for the General Assembly

This work involves, first, logistic efforts to ready the physical arrangements and, specially, the human elements of this fundamental institutional session scheduled for September 22, 2008. Representatives of our 135 Member Societies, as voting participants, are key Assembly protagonists, but also important is to accommodate members of the Executive Committee, Council, Zonal Representatives, as well as invited representatives of our Scientific Sections, Standing Committees, Institutional Programs, and Young Psychiatrist Council. The standing of the official representative of each Member Society, presenting an authorization from the society’s president and secretary, is to be validated by the Accreditation Committee, which is also responsible for documenting the voting power of each society.

The draft agenda for the Extraordinary General Assembly (responsible for deciding on proposed amendments of Statutes and By-Laws) and of the immediately ensuing Ordinary General Assembly (responsible for all the rest of items, including the acceptance of reports, admittance of new Member Societies, election of officers, and approval of action items) has already been distributed to Members Societies. Some of these have already responded with suggestions.

To be noted in particular is that a crucial responsibility of the Ordinary General Assembly is the careful review, discussion, and approval of each of the action items. These include, first, the overall Action Plan 2005-2008 which was drafted by the Planning Committee and has been preliminarily reviewed by the Executive Committee, Council and Board and that deserves pointed attention by the Member Societies, before and during the General Assembly. Other important action items are those involving Institutional Programs, some of which are expected to be expanded, illustratively that on Person-centered Psychiatry likely to be interconnected to similar initiatives with other global medical and health organizations and that for Young Psychiatrists. Further action items would include those related to specific ethics guidelines and those presented by Member Societies.

Finalizing the Program for the World Congress

We are in the process of completing the preparations for the XIV World Congress of Psychiatry that will congregate us in fascinating Prague on September 20-25, 2008 as a culminating point of this triennium and its achievements. Several exceptional features promise to make our upcoming Congress remarkable and unprecedented in terms of engagement with the hosting nation and city, a rich scientific program, and outstanding cultural offers.

The XIV WCP will be the first one in our history to be inaugurated by the sitting Head of State, H.E. Mr.Vaclav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic. Furthermore, one of the plenary lectures will be
given by Mr. Pavel Bem, a psychiatrist and the Lord Major of Prague, who has offered City Hall for our special art exhibit open to the general public.

The scientific program of the World Congress under the overall theme of Science and Humanism: For a Person-centered Psychiatry affirms a psychiatry that systematically cultivates our biological, psychological and social sciences placing them at the service of the person and his/her values and aspirations. It is noteworthy that the scientific program has been constructed with a record number of submissions and that it covers and articulates the various areas of our field with the participation of psychiatrists from across the world as well as unprecedented levels of other health professionals, families and patients.

We have scheduled four Plenary Lectures given by the WPA President and President-Elect, the Jean Delay Prize recipient, and, as already mentioned, the Lord Major of Prague; and 50 Special Lectures presented by eminent scientists, health leaders, and the recipients of the Philippe Pinel Prize on Psychiatry for the Person and the UlyssesVianna Prize for Young Psychiatrists in Developing Countries. We will have the opportunity to attend over 230 Symposia and 70 Workshops and Courses. Also attractive are eight Forums and six Video & Film Sessions. Additionally scheduled are substantial numbers of New Research Reports, Oral Communications, and Posters. Among the highlights of the scientific program and closely connected to the Congress overall theme are a set of Special Symposia on Person-centered Psychiatry and Medicine and on International Classification and Diagnosis, a cross-Congress track (trialogs, symposia and lectures) on interactions among service users, families, and professionals, and a Special Track for Young Psychiatrists encompassing four Fellows Symposia, 16 Workshops led by world experts, and complementary encounters built on experience gained over several previous congresses.

Concerning cultural events, we can mention first that our Congress will offer dedicated performances of Mozart’s Don Giovanni, first presented in Prague where the composer felt particularly understood. Other cultural highlights include special visits to the Pragues of Franz Kafka, Sigmund Freud, Charles the IV, Antonin Dvorak and Bedrich Smetana. Already mentioned is the special Exhibit on Art and
Person, reflecting the Congress’ overall theme. Additionally, there are few more enjoyable pleasures than getting lost on the walks and alleys of Prague’s old city.

Let’s look forward to the celebration of our field in interaction with colleagues and friends in a splendid city and to the opportunity to forge new relationships to advance our noble profession and our personal lives.

Hoping to greet you personally in Prague this September.

Cordially yours,

Prof. Juan E. Mezzich
President of the World Psychiatric Association