

**AUGUST 11, 2006**  
**AVAPL NEW PRESIDENT'S REMARKS**

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2007 will mark AVAPL's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I have been thinking about that a lot lately. In part, I have been feeling really intimidated thinking about all of the incredible people that have served before me as President. However, I have also been thinking about the journey of VA psychology over the years and, especially, about the tumultuous changes that have occurred in our field over the last decade. These changes have severely challenged us. But I also firmly believe that they provide us with a set of unique opportunities.

I would like to discuss with you a few of these challenges and give you a preview of the opportunities that I would like to see AVAPL work on in the months ahead. My goals for AVAPL fall under three basic categories, **ADVOCACY**, **EDUCATION**, and **MUTUAL SUPPORT**:

**Advocacy**

On the first of these – advocacy – AVAPL has been a very effective advocate on behalf of issues of concern to VA psychologist leaders. For example, members of AVAPL, together with colleagues from Division 18 and VACO's Office of Mental Health Services (OMHS) were largely responsible for creating the new Hybrid 38/5 Qualification Standards and Model Functional Statements. During the coming year, I would like us to continue to emphasize advocacy, while working on the following specific issues:

- I would like to see us continue to partner with OMHS to work toward final implementation of Hybrid 38/5 conversion. AVAPL should also serve as a watchdog to see that this process is implemented fairly at the local, VISN and national levels.
- AVAPL should continue to press for the approval and implementation of the Psychologist Executive Directive, with the goal of having this accomplished in Fiscal Year 2007. Regardless of medical center organizational structure, and regardless of which discipline controls overall mental health services, the integrity of psychological training and practice must remain firmly within the hands of psychology.

- Even with the advent of Hybrid 38, and assuming the implementation of a Psychologist Executive Directive, our profession still suffers from an unfair bias towards psychiatry in hiring for mental health management positions at the local and VISN levels. The Undersecretary's Directive on Mental Health Management Recruitment, while an important policy statement, has done little to change the realities in the field on this issue. There are a number of institutional and cultural reasons for this bias, especially in our academically affiliated medical centers. I believe that, in order to effectively challenge this bias, the non-medical mental health disciplines must present a united front. As such, I would like to begin a dialogue with other mental health disciplines on this issue. We need to work together to address the most common barriers to fair and equitable access to VA mental health leadership positions.
- Another key advocacy topic concerns internship and post-doctoral psychology training. In recent years, VA psychology has generally been lucky in that we have usually had someone informally representing the interests of our training programs on APA's Commission on Accreditation (COA). However, despite being one of the nation's largest providers of psychology internships and post-docs, there is no formal VA seat on COA. One of several reasons for this is that our numerous training programs have never organized themselves into a cohesive entity that can advocate for the interests of VA psychological training. AVAPL has traditionally provided a venue for VA training directors to meet and to discuss issues of mutual concern. During the coming year, I believe that our organization, working together with efforts underway through OMHS, should serve as a midwife to the birth of a new organization of VA psychology training directors. This new organization would provide mutual support and assistance for training directors and their programs, and would provide a powerful advocacy vehicle within the APA accreditation system.
- In the last few years, the AVAPL membership has developed a consensus in favor of pursuing prescriptive authority for appropriately trained VA psychologists. As president, I will look for opportunities to effectively advocate for a prescribing psychologist pilot project within the VA.

## Education

My second major area of concern is education. In order to stake out a leadership claim for ourselves, we need to help VA psychologists to understand the fundamental changes that have and continue to occur in mental health care. If we want the VA to see us as leaders, we have to demonstrate that we understand new mental health approaches and paradigms; that we can help place these within a broader healthcare context; that we understand the mechanics and politics of planning, implementation, and program evaluation; and, finally, that we have the vision to help our facilities and networks to achieve success in this new mental health care environment. If we have a reputation of sophisticated and insightful leadership in these areas, our claim on a fair share of formal leadership positions will be much easier to substantiate. In the months ahead, I would like to see us pursue several efforts in this area:

- This coming year will mark the 10th Anniversary of the VA Psychology Leadership Conference, a partnership between APA, AVAPL, and Division 18. The importance of improving our knowledge and skills to enable us to lead in a new mental health care environment will be an important theme for Dallas 10.
- The new AVAPL mentoring program, being introduced at this meeting, will be a very important part of this educational effort. We will be working to provide the tools that mentors and protégés need to be successful in the creation of their career development plans.
- These are great efforts, but we need to go further. We need to provide a variety of educational tools to our membership, including resource libraries, web based learning, newly energized bulletin board discussions, moderated "chat room" conversation hours, audio – and maybe even video -- conference trainings, and other development opportunities.
- It is also my hope that we can improve and extend our already close working relationship with APA to help develop and present resource and training material that will enable psychologists to become the recognized leaders of mental health change throughout the system.

## **Support**

My final theme is mutual support. Over the last several minutes I have laid out a very ambitious agenda. I'm sure that Steve, Kathy, June, Pam, and I won't be able to accomplish it by ourselves. In fact, I don't think that this agenda can be accomplished even with the able help of our always dedicated group of Past President advisors. I do, however, think that we ultimately can be successful at pursuing our advocacy agenda and at developing and supporting the careers and concerns of our membership.

The missing ingredient here is you. I want to ask all of you here today, as well as our members who couldn't make it to New Orleans this year, to remember, and take to heart, that this is the Association of VA Psychologist Leaders. We can accomplish tremendous things for our organization if we all participate and help each other.

Throughout the coming year I will be asking each of you for your help:

- I will ask you to be active in sharing with us your priorities, your concerns, and your ideas.
- I will be asking those of you with organizational experience and seniority to become mentors for our early and mid-career members. No responsibility is more important to ensuring the continuity of psychological leadership than passing on your knowledge and experience to a new generation of leaders.
- I will be asking those of you with area expertise to provide us with resource materials. I'll be asking a number of you to volunteer as bulletin board and chat room moderators, or as presenters on audio conferences and in other educational venues.
- And, I will be asking the technophiles among you to assist Jeff Burke with the growth of our electronic resources.

This is a leadership organization and I challenge all of you to lead by volunteering for projects and initiatives over the course of the coming year. If we all work together, we can significantly improve the effectiveness of our advocacy and can make sure that AVAPL is viewed by its members as an important and ongoing part of their professional lives.

Thank you for the honor of serving as AVAPL President. I hope that I can do a good job for all of you in the coming year.