Psychiatry and Faith Community Leaders Kick Off Collaboration Aimed at Reducing Stigma and Improving Mental Health Care

ARLINGTON, Va. (July 11, 2014) — Today more than 40 prominent, diverse faith, psychiatric and other mental health leaders gathered to inaugurate the Mental Health and Faith Community Partnership, a collaboration between psychiatrists and clergy aimed at fostering a dialogue between two fields, reducing stigma, and accounting for medical and spiritual dimensions as people seek care. The convening organizations are the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the American Psychiatric Foundation (APF) and the Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition (IDAC), a program of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD). The partnership also announced it will create new resources to train religious leaders about mental health and substance use disorder issues and for psychiatrists about faith and faith communities in mental health recovery.

“This partnership recognizes that what’s important is the health of the whole person,” said former Congressman Patrick Kennedy. “There should be no wrong path to seeking help. A stronger dialogue and a deeper understanding between our clergy, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals can only enrich a person on the journey toward a healthy mind and a renewed spirit. With this partnership, faith and mental health leaders will be better equipped to understand the totality of an individual's needs and values.”

Participants in the partnership include:

- APA President Paul Summergrad, MD
- AAPD President and CEO Mark Perriello and Director of AAPD Interfaith Initiative Ginny Thornburgh
- APF Executive Director Paul Burke
- Sister Nancy Kehoe, RSCJ, Ph.D., author of “Wrestling with Our Inner Angels: Faith, Mental Illness, and the Journey to Wholeness”
- Bishop William Young of the Healing Center Ministries in Memphis, Tenn.
- Rabbi Edythe Held Mencher, LSCW
- Dr. Sayyid Syeed, National Director of the Islamic Society of North America
- and dozens of other national mental health and faith community leaders.

APA President Paul Summergrad, MD, noted, “The agenda for this partnership is ambitious but reflects the scope of the challenges we face. There is much to be done to reduce stigma, enhance education about, and address the prevalence of mental illness in our society, so working together is imperative. This July also marks Diversity Mental Health Month, which matters because studies have shown that many groups, such as Hispanics and African Americans, are more inclined to reach out to a member of their faith community than to a mental health professional when experiencing signs of mental illness. The American Psychiatric
Association is deeply committed to entering into a respectful dialog with faith-based leaders, to listen, learn and provide the best evidence based education about mental illness we can provide.”

The convening organizations said the partnership provides an opportunity for psychiatrists and the mental health community to learn from spiritual leaders, to whom people often turn in times of mental distress, as well as an opportunity to improve understanding of the best science and evidence based treatment for psychiatric disorders among faith leaders and those in the faith community.

“According to the World Health Organization, 18.7 percent of the U.S. population has some form of neuropsychiatric condition, like depression,” said AAPD President and CEO Mark Perriello. “Many of these individuals receive minimally acceptable levels of care through America’s public and private healthcare systems, and often turn to their faith communities for additional support. Through the partnership between the American Psychiatric Association and AAPD's Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition, we will educate faith leaders and psychiatrists about the important role of spirituality for many in the recovery process, ultimately providing better care and better outcomes for many people with mental and behavioral health conditions.”

Added Ginny Thornburgh, AAPD’s Interfaith Program Director: “Although IDAC members come from many faith traditions, they are united by a common commitment to honor all people with disabilities. This means seeing someone with a psychiatric disability as a person first—someone with a name, someone with dreams and goals, and someone who requires specific community services to achieve his or her potential and to contribute to the community. We’re hopeful this partnership will help advance this commitment within and beyond communities of faith in our society.”

The American Association of People with Disabilities is the nation's largest disability rights organization. AAPD promotes equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation for people with disabilities. Its members, including people with disabilities and our family, friends, and supporters, represent a powerful force for change. To learn more, visit the AAPD at www.aapd.com.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 35,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at www.psychiatry.org.

The American Psychiatric Foundation is the philanthropic and public education arm of the American Psychiatric Association and is on the web at www.americanpsychiatricfoundation.org.

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