

## Strengthening the scientific backbone of the WPA

As per WPA by-laws, the overarching aims of the Scientific Sections comprise the “collection, analysis, presentation, and dissemination of information concerning services, research, and training in the various fields of psychiatry and mental health and the advancement of scientific knowledge in these fields”.

This is a lot, and may be considered quite ambitious by some. But, on the other hand, the Sections have become known as the “scientific backbone” of the WPA and, as such, they are meant to carry a lot of weight and provide a framework for our field, that is so diverse and deals with disorders that present with a combined lifetime prevalence of up to 40 percent. This diversity certainly is one of the reasons why the number of Sections has now grown to 72.

Given this importance for WPA, the post of Secretary for Scientific Sections comes with a great deal of responsibility and calls for a continuous thought process on how to further develop the Sections and keep them engaged.

In close collaboration with the President and the other members of WPA’s Executive Committee, I will dedicate the next six years to the implementation of the following goals:

- *Improve and streamline communication between the Sections and facilitate research and publication projects.* With the Sections being the backbone for scientific advances within the WPA, the Association will develop an infrastructure that allows for brainstorming on research ideas, swift exchange of research proposals, comments, joint publications, etc.. Coordinated by the Secretariat<sup>1,2</sup>, this will be achieved by acquiring novel and flexible information technology (IT) tools, such as web-based conferencing or sharepoints, and social media outlets. Such infrastructure will also be used to build a database on funding opportunities, with the idea to list country by country names and contact details of fund-

ing bodies/agencies and current requests for applications (RFAs) relevant to WPA’s work. The emphasis should lie on RFAs aimed at international collaborations. The Sections should furthermore be encouraged to take up research projects that are in line with WPA’s Action Plan<sup>3</sup> and/or the cities-RISE<sup>4</sup> initiative that WPA has partnered with. Ideally, this could be incentivized through a WPA program to offer seed funding based on a matched funding scheme.

- *Continue and expand the intersectional activities of WPA.* Over the past decade, the WPA has stepped up its efforts to foster intersectional activities at various levels<sup>5,6</sup>. This has ranged from arranging intersectional symposia or workshops at WPA meetings to major conferences like the joint meeting of the Section on Epidemiology and Public Health and the Section on Genetics in Psychiatry in Munich in 2016. Ideally, intersectional activities apply a cross-regional approach.
- *Leverage the Sections’ experiences and resources to further WPA’s activities for early career psychiatrists.* Investing into early career individuals is an investment into the future of WPA and psychiatry in general. This is why the WPA established an Early Career Psychiatrists (ECP) Section, following the successful example of the WPA Early Career Psychiatrists Council<sup>7</sup>. I will closely work with this Section to make sure that early career clinicians and researchers are sufficiently represented in the leadership and activities of all Sections. Leveraging the IT framework currently being built, the creation of a mentoring data base will be explored. Within the ECP program at WPA meetings, I consider implementing “science slams” where ECP individuals would present in a very brief form (5 min or less) current research projects/ideas/grant proposals to the audience. Senior representatives from the WPA Executive Committee, Board, Council, and

Sections should be present and comment and give advice.

- *Promote gender equity at all levels of Sections and their activities.* Together with the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, I will implement measures to promote gender equity across all Sections, in particular as regards committee members and office bearers.
- *Establish cross-country peer networks of researchers to facilitate and share access to knowledge, resources, and strategies to publish successfully.* Building on the aforementioned resources and strategies, the Sections should be encouraged to establish efficient and long-lasting research networks spanning the globe. These could give rise to powerful consortia tackling important research questions and serve as catalysts for early career clinicians and scientists.
- *Establish truly authentic and compassionate relationships with organizations representing patients and caregivers.* In order to truly bring about change and to improve the lives of millions, WPA needs to bring together researchers/clinicians, patients, and family members/caregivers<sup>8</sup>. Sections are ideally suited to initiate such “trialogue”<sup>9</sup>, focusing on specific topics of practical relevance to patients while at the same time establishing links to the research world.

These proposals will be tightly coordinated with the plans and work programs of the new Secretaries for Education and Scientific Publications, as well as the newly established Science Committee. Their implementation and integration in WPA’s Action plan is currently discussed at the level of the WPA Executive Committee and Board.

The Secretary for Scientific Sections welcomes any further suggestions as to the future work and visibility of the Sections, WPA’s scientific backbone.

Thomas G. Schulze  
WPA Secretary for Scientific Sections

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## WPA Secretary for Education work plan

WPA vision is to advocate for “a world in which people live in conditions that promote mental health and have access to mental health treatment and care that meet appropriate professional and ethical standards, integrate public health principles and respect human rights”.

To achieve the aim of ensuring equitable access to mental health care for people in different parts of the world, high-quality mental health education for professionals taking care of people with mental health problems must be provided. Driving sustainable changes in mental health services also requires collaborative partnerships with service users, carers, and other community stakeholders<sup>1,2</sup>.

Therefore, my WPA education vision is “Education for all: no matter who you are, where you are, and how you are, with a strategic intent to improve mental health of all people around the Globe”.

Service users and carers, as well as the general public, should have access to evidence-based mental health information. With the assistance of Member Societies and early career psychiatrists, the WPA website will provide hyperlinks to websites with high-quality mental health information<sup>3</sup>. As of today, we have identified websites with this information in seven languages, including English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic, Hindi and Urdu.

Another initiative is to form a work group to establish a simple guideline for Member Societies and interested individuals to standardize the translation of important WPA documents into major languages.

A related project is to compile a list of recommended, evidence-based mental health apps for mobile devices through the support of the Section of e-Mental Health and other relevant WPA Scientific Sections. Besides, future WPA meetings

will be expected to include free public forums for service users, carers and community stakeholders on topics of major concern to the host countries.

A global survey of training provisions involving WPA Member Societies was conducted in 2017<sup>4</sup>. The survey revealed that 30% of respondent countries provided less than 36 months of psychiatric training. A framework for psychiatric training has been developed and released on the WPA website<sup>5</sup>. The next step is to assist those countries to enhance their psychiatric training and education through different educational initiatives. Given that many psychiatrists with limited training are working in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), an online psychiatric education programme will be an important educational tool<sup>6</sup>.

The WPA has recently collaborated with the University of Melbourne to develop a completely online diploma programme on International Psychiatry<sup>7</sup>. The syllabus aims at enhancing knowledge and skills in psychiatric and risk assessment, essential psychopharmacology, basic psychotherapy, and social and cultural psychiatry. Potential sponsors are currently being identified to provide scholarships for these target participants, particularly those from Member Societies with less than 36 months of psychiatric training. Collaboration with other regional psychiatric associations is also underway to promote this online programme.

Apart from online education, face-to-face experiential training remains an important mode of education. A network of volunteer psychiatrists with different psychiatric expertise is now being developed in collaboration with major national psychiatric associations. The WPA will serve as a platform to coordinate continuous training and supervision by experts addressing the identified needs in the re-

ipient countries, and to find potential sponsors to support travel and accommodation costs for the visiting scholars. Such travel fellowships have been found to be valuable in other medical specialties<sup>8</sup>. This programme is now under development in Asia in collaboration with the Asian Federation of Psychiatric Associations (AFPA).

Apart from supporting psychiatrists who have completed psychiatric training, the WPA is determined to support and develop talents for mental health at the start of medical career. In collaboration with the International Federation of Medical Students, a global survey on the psychiatric curriculum in basic medical education has just been completed. The survey results will inform the WPA on how undergraduate psychiatric curriculum can be enriched in medical school education<sup>9</sup>.

The WPA also recognizes early career psychiatrists as our next generation in promoting the betterment of global mental health. Therefore, every work group on education will have at least one early career psychiatrist being involved as a regular member. Apart from having their voices and ideas being heard in these work groups, early career psychiatrists may also benefit from learning the leadership styles of senior members. Last but not least, future WPA congresses will endeavor to identify possible means to support medical students and early career psychiatrists to participate in educational symposia and academic exchanges.

The educational needs of other professionals working in mental health will also be addressed. The aforementioned WPA online diploma also targets primary care doctors working with patients with mental health problems. Separate scholarships will also be identified for this target group of potential applicants. Fur-