

## How APA Has Failed Clinicians: One Psychologist's Opinion

I woke up this morning (06/06/06) to discover that the head of the psychiatry department at the University of Chicago had just made an amazing discovery. He discovered through what must be a beautiful piece of research that road rage is caused by a mental defect, he calls it intermittent explosive disorder. He claims that there "is biology and cognitive science to this." He goes on to claim that possibly sixteen million Americans are affected by this disorder. How incredibly absurd! It gets better... NIMH funded this study. Can this get any funnier? Yes. It was published in the June issue of the Archives of General Psychiatry. The author stated that this disorder involves inadequate production or functioning of serotonin. The study was based on the national face-to-face survey of 9282 US adults who answered diagnostic questions between 2001 from 2003. I'm willing to bet that within three months, the FDA will approve one of the SSRI's to treat this particular "brain defect". Better yet a "Big Pharma Company will discover a new medication to treat this brain impairment. This story was also on the CBS evening news today. By the end of this story, the anchorman could barely keep from breaking into laughter. I can't wait to read the actual article and see the magnificent research that led to this amazing conclusion. In the same Herald-Tribune newspaper was another article entitled, "Antipsychotic drug treatment for children, soaring recently". It's stated that drug treatment for children and adolescents for such problems as aggression and mood swings increased more than five fold from 1993 to 2002. The article, which appears in the Archives of General Psychiatry, stated that there were many side effects and serious consequences from the use of antidepressants, antipsychotics and psychostimulants. It went on to mention that none of the most commonly prescribed antipsychotics is approved for use in children. Only a handful of studies have been done in children and adolescents.

OK, so this is interesting but why am I discussing it here? I am discussing it, because there are times when I don't believe what the medical profession gets away with. Don't get me wrong, I don't want to be like them. What I do want is for psychologists to get off our hands and take charge of the things we know about as a profession. Medication is not the only thing that works. There are other alternatives such as therapy and psychological intervention. The world unfortunately, continues to take drugs, and Medicine obscures other alternatives to potentially dangerous, unproven, poorly studied, greed inspired, and medication only treatments. For the public to know that we exist as a profession, we must take our hands out of our pockets, spend some money and make ourselves heard and known as psychologists. We have thus far failed to do this. Other professions, such as chiropractors, nurses, and others have moved far ahead of psychologists and have taken control of their professional careers. As you know, we have failed to do this. We have not had the will and APA has lacked the drive. It is still an academic and science organization although practitioners now are in the majority. I don't want to eliminate APA but I believe that it needs to get out of the way when it comes to practitioners.. It has failed in so many ways to take the lead in representing psychology and specifically clinicians. Perhaps the organization for too long has been on Capitol Hill and model the politicians and bureaucrats who reside there. Like many, APA has failed to represent their majority: practitioners who comprise their vast membership.

The last time I asked APA for assistance I was treated officiously by the bureaucracy. At the end of the day I was exhausted! After finally reaching someone who I was told could help me, he was sympathetic to my dilemma and frustration, but couldn't imagine what he could do to be of help. I looked out of his window, which faced the capital building, I said to him, "you get more and more like those guys everyday." He thanked me and accepted graciously, what he thought was a compliment.

What I am getting around to in my own slow way is my need for an organization that will represent our professional needs. I'm tired of watching APA fail to make an impact on the things that concern us. I'm tired of the games going on between the National Register and BEA, the education wing of APA. I've watched ABPP act less than professional toward other organizations because they are such a crippled bunch. They recently made an end run around the Legislature of Florida in order to gain exclusivity in using only their name and not letting others use the theirs after your title as a psychologist. Enough foolishness! This is not what I pay dues for. NAPPP promises to be different and I am willing to give them a chance to prove themselves. This is why I joined NAPPP as a member and board director.

I want to be a part of an organization that is fleet footed and concerned about my practice and yours. I want this organization to represent me as a practitioner so that we may have prestige and yes, a thriving practice. I want a say in the direction of the future of professional psychology. I am asking that we have what all other organizations have who have reached psychology's same level of maturity. I want psychologists to stop shooting ourselves in the foot and rounding up the wagons so he can shoot inward at ourselves. Surely, we have more potential than this. I believe strongly in ethics and high standards as much as every other psychologist. We care about our profession and our patients.

If you want to think about something amazing think about this. Psychiatrists number about 22,000 and are decreasing rapidly. APA says we have about 150,000 members. So how come psychiatry gets all the press with silly articles like the one above? Are they smarter than us? Someone might be willing to make that case but I believe its due to inaction and malaise by APA. With millions of dollars in dues and property, a budget exceeding the gross national product of several countries, APA can't seem to muster a decent and effective public relations campaign to educate and raise public consciousness about who we are and what we do as psychologists. Poll after poll shows that most people cannot discern the difference between psychologists and psychiatrists.

I think we can do better. We have the leadership, we have the programs, and we have the will. With some strategic planning and concerted aggressive action, I believe we can move this profession ahead. NAPPP has good leadership that has proven itself. But we need your help so we can succeed. We cannot continue each year loosing ground to other mental-health professionals. The status quo is not working for practicing psychologists. Our time has come to step out from the shadows and let people know, what we can be and do as a profession. If you want a change then help make it happen. Join NAPPP.

