Personal Statement

Dear members of the WPA family,

I have been actively involved with the WPA since 2011 when I was elected Chair of the Section on Genetics. In 2017, you entrusted me with the office of Secretary for Scientific Sections. In the past six years, with the invaluable help of my colleagues on the Executive Committee, Council, and the Board as well as with so many of you, I have had the honor of improving intersectional communication, facilitating interdisciplinary research and publication projects, and making intersectional activities a hallmark of every WPA meeting. And lest we forget that we achieved all that despite the challenges posed by the pandemic: a testament to the resourcefulness of our great association!

We have implemented measures to promote diversity and equity within the Sections and leveraged their resources to further WPA’s activities for early career psychiatrists, with the Education, Science, Publication, and Research Initiative (ESPRI), aimed at colleagues in low- and middle-income countries, being a prime example. Establishing close ties with early career psychiatrists has proven pivotal to establishing a global exchange program. Our intersectional activities are enriched by the active participation of patients and caregivers. This triological approach is also a main element of two large European Union grants that I have been able to secure for WPA and which are boosting WPA’s educational and scientific mission.

If elected President-Elect, I will support our new EC in promoting the triennial action plan 2023-2026, building on and continuing the core mission of the previous actions plans, i.e., consolidating psychiatry as an integral and indispensable part of medicine serving the most vulnerable around the globe. While triennial action plans may differ at the level of specific programs, I firmly believe that in an ever more distressing world WPA must develop and promote a core set of goals. Looking back at my work with WPA the past decade, I would posit that three core goals have emerged: (1) Working towards mental health parity in all imaginable areas and at all levels; (2) developing human rights-based mental health care; and (3) strengthening public mental health by supporting communities. While one can formulate many more goals, I believe that these three aims capture the essence of what WPA considers its paramount mission: Advance psychiatry and mental health for people all over the world.

Mental health parity has been a buzzword for many years. However, it is more than that. It is a constant reminder that our field must fight for the needs and rights of our patients, their families and caregivers, our colleagues, and institutions around the globe and around the clock. Which leads us to the second goal: standing up for mental health parity means fighting for a human right. It is my goal that universal human rights guide WPA’s activities and policies: wherever mental health and mental health care are threatened, through lack of education or hurtful policies; through unwarranted cuts to resources; through natural disasters; through ethnic or religious persecution, or genocide; or through threats to livelihoods due to climate change, WPA needs to be the voice to call for decisive action, creating and defending environments full of diversity and equity. And these actions need to start within the community. Working with all stakeholders, we need to reach out to where our expertise is needed, building sustainable and trust-based networks of care and education. I will make sure that this outreach will be in lockstep with our member societies whose ideas and input will be crucial for the success of this mission. To this end, we will also have to develop close partnerships with other organizations, while always being true to what we are: a medical discipline deeply rooted in science and guided by empathy towards those who seek our help.