

## 2020 Spring Highlights Meeting: CEO and Medical Director Address

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Hello, and welcome to the APA's Virtual Highlights Meeting.

I'm delighted to be speaking with you all, although I wish it was under better circumstances.

In the more than 175-year history of the APA, there have only been 4 years when the APA didn't hold an in-person meeting, the most recent of which date back to the end of the Second World War (1945) and the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War (1861).

I want to thank the speakers who worked with us to adapt their sessions to share with you for this landmark virtual meeting, as well as the staff who did an amazing job putting this together under a very short timetable.

We will continue to meet virtually as an organization through the end of this year, at which point we hope we can gather in-person for a full annual meeting in Los Angeles.

I must commend the NYSPA, its leadership, and DBs as a shining example of how we should respond to a crisis. They are showing that we are physicians first, with an expertise in psychiatry. As members of the House of Medicine, it is incumbent on us to step up and aid in ending this crisis any way we can.

I will add that all mental health care professionals who are engaged in treatment should not have to supply their own personal protective equipment (PPE), this must come from the hospital systems and the state and federal government.

We have been very vocal that the federal government has a duty to ensure that all patients can get the treatment they need and that our physicians, health care workers, hospital staff, and first responders have the protection necessary to bring this crisis to a safe and swift end.

I want to thank every person working to end the COVID-19 pandemic, the most significant public health emergency of our lifetimes, for the extraordinary sacrifice they are making to treat patients and save lives.

This crisis has touched all of us, and we owe everyone working to end it a debt of gratitude.

This new decade is off to a challenging start, and I really hope that from this, we find opportunities to make change for the better.

Psychiatry will be faced with many new opportunities to make history in the coming decade, and at APA, our leaders, members, and the APA Administration are working hard to make the most of these opportunities.

In the last year, the APA, with funding from SAMHSA, has established a national center of excellence for all clinicians treating patients with serious mental illness, called SMI Adviser.

In the last 12 months, this innovative initiative has provided free education to more than 15,000 clinicians, has answered over 200 consultation questions from frontline clinicians, and has developed dozens of tools to help psychiatrists treating individuals with serious mental illness.

Despite considerable polarization in the current political environment, APA has worked across party lines to ensure that psychiatry has a strong advocacy voice at the national and state levels.

APA successfully advocated against a proposal to weaken Medicare's six protected classes, which would have undermined patient access to the full range of medications.

APA achieved introduction and major progress moving the bipartisan Mental Health Parity Compliance Act in Congress. APA's legislation requires insurers to "show their work" and demonstrate how their practices comply with federal parity law requirements. The bill is positioned for possible enactment this year.

At the state level, Arizona recently became the eighth state to enact APA's model parity compliance legislation. And our legislation has been introduced in another 15 states.

Illinois became the first state to sign into law APA-drafted legislation requiring private insurance coverage of codes for the Collaborative Care Model, and other states are planning to introduce similar legislation soon. Our advocacy efforts also resulted in several state Medicaid agencies agreeing to accept collaborative care codes.

I want to thank Dr. Bruce Schwartz for his leadership over the past year. He and our colleagues on the Board of Trustees are a big part of our successes over the past year and have helped to lay the groundwork for a bright future for psychiatry. Bruce has stepped up more times than anyone realizes to meet the needs of leadership. I am sorry that his meeting was unable to be brought to fruition—but like always, he rolled with the punches and said, "So what can we now do to meet the needs of our members, patients, and the public"? That can-do mindset has led us to this spring highlights meeting.

I want to congratulate Dr. Jeffrey Geller as he takes over as APA President at the conclusion of this meeting. I have known Jeff for years, and I'm excited to continue to work with him. I know he will rise to meet the challenges of the coming year.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis, I want to reassure you all that the APA is strong. Our membership is strong, our Administration is strong, and I want to thank my

chiefs and all the staff who work both long hours—weekdays and weekends—and also carry the mission of APA into their lives and the people they interact with, and we are working more closely today than ever.

I know that our members and our colleagues all over the world will come together to put in the hard work necessary to meet this challenge and address the major issues affecting our patients and profession, like disparities in treatment for members of minority/underrepresented groups, high incarceration rates for people with mental illness, barriers that prevent people from accessing care, the opioid crisis, the need for more research funding, the end of stigma, and the need for

true mental health parity and equity. As we have now seen, the public and all of medicine realize they need our expertise. As psychiatrists, we deal with the short-, mid-, and long-term effects of COVID-19. Together we are stronger and will step up to help our colleagues, the health care system, and the public get through this difficult period. Thank you!

#### **AUTHOR AND ARTICLE INFORMATION**

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