

News RELEASE

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APA Academic Consortium Addresses Mental Health Research Funding Issues

Arlington, Va. – The American Psychiatric Association (APA) hosted the 20th Annual Academic Consortium in Washington, D.C., on April 9-10. Leading psychiatrists, neuroscientists and mental health researchers – joined by patients or their family members – met with Members of Congress to urge continued National Institutes of Health (NIH) research funding for mental illness, substance abuse, and alcoholism.

Academic Consortium representatives have met with an impressive degree of success over the last several years in showing policymakers the solid science behind the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders.

Chair of the department of psychiatry at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic at the University of Pittsburgh and Co-founder of the Academic Consortium, David Kupfer, M.D., said, “Last year, Congress and the Administration declared victory on the campaign to double the NIH funding over five years. The NIH has an annual budget of \$27.3 billion. The President has requested a 2 percent increase for FY04, which does not keep pace with medical inflation. We need to make the case that just because the doubling campaign is over does not mean the need for medical research has stopped – we must ensure the research budgets at NIH and the VA are at sustainable levels.”

Co-founder of the Consortium and chair of the psychiatry department at the University of California at San Diego, Lewis L. Judd, M.D., reminded advocates that all Americans lives are directly touched by mental illness research. “While federal funding of neuroscience, behavioral science, and genetics research has led to an explosion of knowledge and promise to advance our understanding of mental illness, unlocking new strategies for disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment and cures, we still face a tremendous array of health challenges. We must translate this basic knowledge into clinical research that will lead to better treatments for the 44.3 million people who suffer from diagnosable mental disorders.”

APA President Paul S. Appelbaum, M.D. welcomed the advocates who gathered at the Washington Court Hotel in Washington, D.C., prior to their short journey to Capitol Hill, and recognized the role that the American Psychiatric Institute for Research and Education, APA’s independent research arm, plays in strengthening the promotion and dissemination of research.

APA Medical Director James H. Scully, M.D., told the group “This is a new era for federal funding of medical research. This year, we also begin a new era in the Academic Consortium by asking the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology and Academic Chairs to join forces with APA and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. While there is some overlap in membership between our organizations, I am excited about formalizing the relationship of these groups’ participation in the Academic Consortium.”

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Dr. Kupfer reiterated the Academic Consortium's pledge to advocate on behalf of research supported by the Department of Veterans Affairs, expanding the group's scope beyond NIH funding to include research and services for this vulnerable population. "While we support the Administration's FY04 proposed budget for veterans' health care, the APA joins with many other veterans groups in requesting an additional \$2 billion, for a total of \$27.3 billion, to ensure the success of the VA's health care mission and ensure that the rights of veterans with mental illness remain protected," he said.

The APA cautioned advocates that while there is substantial support on Capitol Hill this year for increasing the budget for NIH's research mission, Members of Congress need to be reminded – and some convinced – that investing in research on psychiatric disorders is a worthwhile investment.

In response to concerns on Capitol Hill about maintaining accountability and integrity of NIH research projects, Dr. Kupfer answered that we must "not limit necessary research, but continue to rely on the rigorous peer review standards and augment funding for the Research Management Support that funds NIH staff and management services.

An additional highlight included a Capitol Hill reception in the Rayburn House Office Building for Members of Congress and their staff members to meet with their academic psychiatrist constituents. This year, the Academic Consortium honored Rep. Bob Filner (D-Calif.) with the "Distinguished Leadership Award" for championing the cause of veterans with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders. "Distinguished Legislator Awards" were awarded to Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), for his leadership on mental health issues and his support for the NIH doubling campaign, and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), for her strong support of federal investment in biomedical and behavioral research. Additional Members of Congress attending the reception included: Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV), Rep. Timothy Murphy (R-PA), Rep. James Moran (R-VA), Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA), Rep. Joe Wilson, Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ), and Rep. Gary Miller (R-CA). Additionally, NAMI Executive Director Richard Birkel, Ph.D., spoke at the reception about the importance of joining forces for advocacy.

During a breakfast briefing on April 10, Thomas R Insel, M.D., director of the National Institute of Mental Health, met with the Academic Consortium to discuss the strategic research priorities for the NIMH. Additionally, Glenn Hanson, D.D.S., Ph.D., acting director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), discussed NIDA's current priorities and how the advocates can play a role in furthering addiction research at the federal level. Also during the breakfast, APA honored Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) with a "Distinguished Leadership Award", and she updated the group on the current appropriations climate on the Hill. Additionally, NAMI Senior Director of Research Policy Laura Lee Hall, Ph.D., discussed NAMI's involvement with the Consortium.

The Academic Consortium was founded in 1983 by current co-chairs Lewis L. Judd, M.D., Chair, Department of Psychiatry, University of California, San Diego, and David J. Kupfer, M.D., Chair, Department of Psychiatry, Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic. It was created to advocate for expanded federal research of mental illness, substance abuse and alcoholism.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose 35,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. For more information, visit the APA Web site at www.psych.org.

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