

Supporting the Military

Transcript of APA President John Oldham's Presidential Address

December, 2011

Hi everybody, welcome back. It's always a challenge to figure out the best way to use this time because there's not very much of it and always a lot to say. I thought what I'd do is tell you about two meetings that happened, or rather one that happened last week, and one that will come up in a few weeks that we're already planning. I got a letter from the vice-chief of staff of the Army a few weeks ago. He's a four-star general named Pete Chiarelli, and he was writing me as President of the APA really expressing his concern about stigma and how to make things better for the troops and get them the treatment that they need. He had a very specific suggestion, that we drop the word "disorder" from the term post-traumatic stress disorder and just call it post-traumatic stress. It's an interesting and understandable suggestion that he made. I wrote him back and said we were really always struggling with the problem of stigma and we appreciated his concern and that dropping the word "disorder" might not be the best way to go but we were eager to work with him to see what we could do. I said maybe there is an alternative approach like doing this like the Canadians had done recently, they coined the term Operational Stress Injury and perhaps we could consider something like that. The General wrote me back and said he thought that would be something that could go a long-way, just even to change the word and he asked us for a meeting. So, last week Jay Scully and I went to the Pentagon and had a very interesting meeting with the General. We weren't totally sure what to expect and when we went in, it turns out it was a very cordial meeting. He said "look, I'm not trying to be a hard-ass. I'm trying to open a channel of communication to see if we can do something about this problem of stigma." He said he figured out half of the troops who need treatment won't go because of the problem of stigma. We had a good discussion and I said I'd be very open to bringing the suggestion back to our experts at the APA who are experts in trauma and PTSD and also to our task force for DSM to think about some possible sub-category, something like combat post-traumatic stress injury. So, we're going to do that. And we ended it on a good note. He gave me his personal email and asked us to continue to work together and we will.

The second meeting is one that's scheduled for January 10th. This is a meeting that will be held at the White House in connection with the launch of a wonderful program that's been developed by Michelle Obama and Jill Biden called **Joining Forces**. Actually our American Psychiatric Foundation and APIRE are already working with this initiative. They want to bring

people together to have an in-person meeting. It will be the leaders of all the professional medical associations and many other groups in mental health. We had a conference discussion about this in planning for the meeting and really the need for it is enormous. The focus is on veterans and also on military, but especially for their families with an effort on education and getting good material out there so families can know what to expect and know the details about things like combat depression, combat stress, and trauma. It's also focused on an effort to emphasize wellness and also get the troops back into good employment. So, this is really interesting. The staff told us that in the next four years there will be close to a million military leaving the military so this is a huge challenge and a demand that we have to do the best we can to meet. I think these are wonderful programs that are going on and efforts and I feel privileged to represent you as a participant in these efforts. I thought about it, especially at the holiday season now, it's a time when families get together and celebrate. A lot of families are celebrating because they are being reunited as the soldiers come back from the war. But, a lot of them are suffering, and suffering a lot because they are really stressed or lost loved ones or the loved ones coming home have serious injuries. Those are the things we want to do everything we can to help them with.

Let me just close by wishing each and every one of you a very special and very happy holiday season.