



**ACNP President's Letter 2017**  
**Anissa Abi-Dargham, M.D.**

Dear Members,

It is a deep honor to work with all of you this year in my capacity as President of ACNP. We are united by our passion for science, for understanding the brain and mental illness and for making a difference in our patients' lives. In the year ahead we continue to face deep challenges. Our nation is dealing with serious epidemics: the opiate epidemic is counting more victims than all other drugs combined, the suicide epidemic is claiming a life every fifteen minutes, the exit of Big Pharma from our field has limited our hopes in new treatments for our patients. Stigma against mental illness is rampant in our society, and the vocal opposition for use of animals in research continues to be a threat. To top all of this off, we know very little about the level of support that the new administration in Washington DC will have towards research in mental health.

On the bright side, we are better equipped to deal with these challenges than ever before, as we build on our recent achievements in the following three areas.

*1- Our membership:* Our College has grown recently to become more inclusive and more open thanks to the diligent efforts of my predecessors and those of past and current committees and task forces created to promote diversity. Women's membership, which started at 4% when the College was founded in 1961, rose very slowly to 14% by 2006, and has now reached 24%, showing the highest rate of growth in the last decade. More importantly, women are taking leadership roles in the College. We will need to continue on this path until we reach equal gender distribution among our membership and in our leadership. Under represented minorities rose to 4%, a progress limited by the low number of applicants, indicating that we need to enhance our efforts in recruiting minority applicants in the year(s) ahead. Furthermore, we have modified the application to membership for colleagues from industry to take into account their particular circumstances, and have been able to successfully increase their representation among our membership. We will maintain this effort and expand it to reach biotech companies. Our members' mean age remains high at 65, and while we celebrate the wisdom of seniority, we also aim to recruit younger scientists to bring new talent and expertise to the field. Finally, we are more open than ever before to our colleagues in various parts of the world: Asia, Europe, and South America, and we will continue these efforts at globalization.

*2- Educational mission:* Our investment in education has grown exponentially in recent years. Both our travel awardees program and our mentees program have expanded to include hundreds of candidates. Both are great programs to help young scientists develop connections, collaborations, and mentorships, and hopefully be inspired to build their careers in related fields of study. It is also a potential pool of

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new, younger members for our College. I want to personally thank all of you who take special time during the meeting to promote these diverse programs.

*3- Our finances:* The College has reached a sound financial status, thanks to the wise and competent financial oversight of David Kupfer and the Parthenon Management Group. The financial growth is such that it allows us this year, for the first time, to use a portion of our earnings to spend on programs that can enhance our mission. Much discussion went into choosing the best ideas and initiatives to support with our extra funds. We have decided to invest in five areas: we will support our Journal in ways that can increase its visibility and impact by allowing it to expand its modern social media tools, set up podcast programs, and build educational tools. We will facilitate attendance at the meeting of past travel awardees and new associate members by offering partial financial support. We will enhance our advocacy efforts to increase funding for brain research and create a special committee to deal with the use of animals in research, since this is a vital tool for many among us. We will also continue to support successful educational programs, especially those targeting physician scientists and under-represented minorities, in collaboration with our partners. Those include SOBP, APA, SFN, ASCP and others. This approach takes advantage of the already existing strengths and connections to yield greater results, ultimately benefitting the mission of ACNP.

In addition to these achievements within our College, at the national level we have recently benefited from great new initiatives, including the BRAIN initiative, the Precision Medicine initiative, and others. A remarkable array of technical advances is now available to basic scientists and brain imaging researchers. The rate of development of new tools is unprecedented. The challenge is to bring these to bear on psychiatric research. While this requires a multilevel, complex and sustained effort by multiple groups, we will continue to support innovation and creativity through our diverse and rich scientific community and bring the best science to our annual meeting. This year, the annual meeting will embrace one of these initiatives, as we will discuss the potential applications of Precision Medicine approaches to the study of behavioral and psychiatric disorders.

I am grateful, as I start my Presidency, for all the achievements made possible by the hard work and vision of my predecessors, especially the immediate past Presidents Raquel Gur and Alan Frazer, and the expert management of the Parthenon Group, Sarah Timm, Ronnie Wilkins and the ACNP staff. I will work diligently with President-Elect Steve Hyman, with Council, and all the committees and their Chairs, and I will also rely on each one of you to be vocal and engaged, as we move our agenda further, especially in the areas of education, advocacy for research, diversity and openness to the international scientific communities.