



ACNP President's Letter 2019

Marina E. Wolf, Ph.D.

I am very proud of the ACNP and honored to serve as President in 2019. The College is unique in its mission of bringing the combined power of basic, clinical and industry scientists to bear on the study and treatment of mental illness. It has also been unique in providing many of us with a place to “grow up” as scientists. I am grateful to the outstanding people I met through the ACNP who became mentors, collaborators and friends, and I am inspired by my ever-increasing appreciation of how hard our members work to support the research, educational and public outreach missions of the College.

Thanks to their efforts and to our exceptional Executive Office, the ACNP has made important strides in integrating cutting edge science into our program, adapting to change in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries, increasing representation of women and under-represented minorities, providing mentorship for young scientists in an increasingly demanding world, and collaborating with other organizations to inform lawmakers about scientific fact that should guide their decision-making.

Nevertheless, to maintain our strength in a changing world, it is time to re-examine our identity and where we want to go in the future, i.e., develop a new Strategic Plan. As a first step, a Task Force is being assembled that will make its first report in July 2019 at the Summer Council Meeting. Overseeing this process while maintaining progress on ongoing initiatives will occupy a great deal of my time as President. A complementary goal, articulated in the statement I prepared when running for the office, is to improve communication between ACNP leadership and the membership. An excerpt from that statement: “...my impression is that important information is not reaching many members despite Council’s best intentions and a continually improving website.” This concern was reinforced for me at the 2018 meeting, where I had many discussions – particularly with younger members – that conveyed a lack of understanding of why certain things in the ACNP “are the way they are”. After discussions with colleagues about how to improve this situation, I have decided to start a blog that will address one major issue at a time. Please bear with me as I get this process under way. In the meantime, here are just a few of the questions we should ask as part of Strategic Planning:

Are we adapting effectively to a changing scientific landscape? We are doing a great deal. Recent Presidential Symposia have focused on remarkable technical advances that have the potential to revolutionize both basic science and therapeutics for mental illness - we have charged the Program and Membership committees to do more to attract experts in these areas to our College. And, as many pharmaceutical companies withdraw from neuroscience, we are trying to take up the slack by altering

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membership policies to level the playing field for industry scientists who remain focused on mental illness, and by developing strategies to interest biotechnology and technology firms in the ACNP mission and its meeting. However, as we deal with existing challenges, new ones emerge. For example, looming on the horizon is Plan S, which would push academic publishing toward an open access model, with substantial financial consequences for our journals and our labs (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/moedas/announcements/plan-s-and-coalition-s-accelerating-transition-full-and-immediate-open-access-scientific_en). We need the input of a new generation of members to remain informed and nimble on all of these fronts.

Are we doing enough to better society? Although the ACNP is a small organization, the high quality of our members and their accomplishments makes us an important voice. Accordingly, we partner effectively with larger advocacy organizations to educate policymakers about the science of psychiatric disorders and their treatments. Such efforts are badly needed in an era when government agencies may disregard scientific fact, animal research is under increasing attack, and the stigma associated with mental illness continues to impede its treatment. In addition to efforts on Capitol Hill, our annual meeting – which is unique in engaging basic, clinical, industry and government scientists including NIH Institute Directors – provides a forum for exploring innovative approaches to pressing health problems, as illustrated by the 2018 Plenary Session titled “The Opioid Crisis: What Solutions Can Science Contribute?”. Later in the meeting, a brainstorming session between ACNP leadership and NIH Institute Directors generated many ideas about how the ACNP might accelerate progress related to the Opioid Crisis and other pressing issues such as the perceived “valley of death” in medications development, if only by providing a venue where stake-holders can come together for open discussions. In my opinion, these advocacy and policy development efforts are critical to ACNP’s mission.

Are we making progress towards diversity and inclusivity? The ACNP has a strong commitment to achieving equality in representation of women and minorities. Remarkable progress has been made for women. In 2018, a higher percent of female applicants than male applicants were accepted at the Member and Associate Member levels. Women presently chair the Program and Membership committees and have increasingly served as President (2015, 2017, 2019, 2020), although we lag with regard to ACNP Awards. The situation for URM (currently defined as African American, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, or Scientist with a Disability) remains unsatisfactory, despite very hard work on the part of the Minority Task Force and other committees. In 2018, 100% of URM applying for Associate or Full Membership were successful, but this added only 5 and 1 URM respectively to these categories. The problem is that the pipeline is small. There will be progress, but it will take more time than any of us would like it to. The College also faces new

challenges. Our Code of Conduct (<https://acnp.org/annual-meeting/code-of-conduct/>) makes it clear that we welcome everyone regardless of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, age, physical or mental disability, perceived disability, ancestry, marital status, sexual orientation, or any other basis protected by federal or pertinent state laws. But is it sufficient to have a policy of inclusivity? Or, do we need to expand our definition of URM to include other groups, such as members of the LGBTQ community or those who have been economically disadvantaged? How do we do so without diluting targets set for URM as currently defined? These issues are best addressed through participation of URM members in the Strategic Planning process. Moving forward, we have to keep an eye on equal representation rather than equal absolute numbers. For a thoughtful consideration of related issues, I refer you to a recent analysis of gender balance among Editors, Reviewers, and Authors for *Neuropsychopharmacology* (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41386-018-0186-6>).

How should we grow? The existing strategic plan of the ACNP is to limit growth so as to maintain an intimate and collegial atmosphere at the meeting. Face-to-face conversations and their unexpected turns can make all the difference in developing an innovative collaborative project or cementing a mentoring relationship. But I acknowledge that this is the view of the “old guard”. We need to hear from our younger members and, if warranted, adjust our viewpoint. Our growth rate also affects our meeting venue. If we want to enjoy warmish weather and avoid convention centers, we have outgrown all but a small number of hotels. Notice that I am not touching the issue of why we can’t go back to Hawaii (at least not in the style to which we were accustomed). Have to save something for the blog.

In closing, I want to thank all of you in advance for taking the time to learn about the issues facing the ACNP so that you can participate productively in Strategic Planning. My time in the College has taught me that this is a fantastic organization comprised of dedicated people who want very much to do the right thing. I hope that all of you will have the same experience, and that progress made during my Presidency will enhance your pride in our College.

Best wishes for a New Year full of excellent data, enough funding to sustain your work, and the time to enjoy family and friends!