Message from the President

Name Change
By David L. Lopez, M.D.

In October, I sent the following letter to the membership:

Dear Colleagues:

At its October 3rd meeting, the Executive Council of the Academy passed a motion that recommends changing the name of the Academy to "American Academy of Psychodynamic Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis". This is just a first step of many that need to occur before a change actually happens. The Council's recommendation concerns only a change in the name of the Academy. There will be no other changes in the Constitution, structure, or membership categories of the Academy.

Executive Council made this recommendation after careful consideration of the following issues:

1) Psychodynamic Psychiatry, as defined by our finest scholars, is a discipline under which Psychoanalysis is placed, but it is broader because it is supplemented by our knowledge of the social sciences, research, and neurosciences. In other words, under this broad umbrella, we can add our knowledge from our training and practice of psychoanalysis to what we also know from being psychiatrists and physicians, as well as our knowledge of humanities.

2) In multiple surveys, it has become obvious that our members are progressively involved more in the practice of psychodynamic treatments, rather than psychoanalysis proper. Therefore, this name reflects better what our members do on a day-to-day basis in their consultation rooms.

3) The Academy distinguishes itself for being the only medical affiliate society of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) that is dedicated to psychodynamic psychotherapy. Since it is also an affiliate of the World Psychiatric Association, stressing our medical background defines better who we are.

4) The word "Psychodynamic" is in line with the wording that is used by the APA, American Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), and the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN).

As I explained above, the recommendation by the Executive Council is the first step of a complicated process. There is a task force that will be looking into which would be the most appropriate abbreviation for the new name, and this will be discussed in our next Executive Council Meeting in May. During the Business Meeting of our Atlanta Annual Meeting (May 2016), all the members of the Academy will have a chance to voice their
concerns and their questions regarding this issue. This discussion will be transcribed and sent to the membership, together with a ballot to vote for or against the new name. If there is a two-thirds approval by at least 40% of the membership, then the new name will be adopted.

Being able to define better who we are and clarify what we mostly dedicate our professional lives to will allow us to improve how we present ourselves to the Psychiatric Community at large, and secondarily will also help us for recruitment purposes.

Please do not hesitate to send us any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

David L. Lopez, MD
President
AAPDP, the Psychodynamic Psychiatry Affiliate Society of the APA

The history behind the letter is interesting. A few months before the above resolution, I named a task force to explore whether our current name reflected accurately our identity as a society. I selected one of the most respected senior past presidents of the Academy to chair it. I also appointed the rest of the task force and chose extremely beloved seasoned members, most of them past presidents. By design, a few of those I picked were people I expected to be against a name change. My reasoning was that if there was going to be controversy, I wanted it to stay within the task force rather than having the opposition criticize the task force from the outside (an old managerial strategy). Even though I was an Ex Officio member, I decided to stay away from the deliberations and was limited to be informed by the reports sent by the chair.

There is a lesson I should have learned by the time I appointed this task force, which is that when one is dealing with psychodynamic psychiatrists, one should expect the unexpected and that the logic of a process is clear only after the fact. Strategies that work in other settings do not necessarily work with a group as complicated as ours. Mistakes sometimes are advantages and clear plans occasionally become mistakes.

Well, what now seems logical occurred. Most of these seasoned members preferred to avoid disagreement and arranged to keep the name as it has been for over a decade. When this was reported to our Executive Council, another unexpected event occurred. Executive Council decided to vote on a motion that our President-Elect presented, which was to change the name, as my letter states, to “American Academy of Psychodynamic Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis”. No one voted against it.

Not surprisingly, as soon as I announced the decision of our Executive Council to the membership, I received complaints from the vocal minority who I had initially assigned to be part of the Name Change Task Force and I knew – from the very beginning – to be against this initiative. Nevertheless, astonishingly to me, I only received those three emails bitterly complaining the decision from Executive Council, but received many in-person and written
messages of support. Our executive office confirmed that no other negative emails have been received to date.

Yet, I have agreed to have another discussion when Executive Council meets in May and be sure this body is certain of this name change, before it is passed to the membership to discuss it at our Business Meeting. It is a tradition of our society whenever a major decision with long-term consequences is being considered, to have several comprehensive discussions. I believe it is a logical and reasonable manner of making important changes so we can be sure that everyone who wants to weigh in on a decision within the leadership is able to. Once this process is cleared and the general membership has a discussion at the Business Meeting in Atlanta, this discussion will be transcribed and sent to all the membership (as specified in my letter). As a reminder, two-thirds by at least 40% of the membership needs to then approve it before it is adopted, if it is going to happen. If we get to this stage, please do not forget to vote!

As always, please feel free to send me your thoughts or questions, and I hope you have good beginning of the New Year, which marks the 60th anniversary of our Academy!

Best regards,
David Lopez