

President's Column

I am delighted to be your new California Psychiatric Association president. I often find myself having thoughts for this column while watching my children performing in the theater. Their most recent show was *Seussical*, which is a collection of stories by Dr. Seuss, and the thought (or “think” as they call them in that show) came as the first act was ending and the three main characters were all in trouble. Horton the elephant had been captured by hunters, Gertrude the bird had grown a tail which was too long for her to fly with, and JoJo the little boy from Whoville had been sent to a military academy. The three scenes which are all onstage at once freeze, and *The Cat in the Hat* comes out singing, “Tell Yourself How Lucky You Are”, a light upbeat song that is in jarring contrast to the situation that each of the characters is facing. This scene resonated with me because although I really do feel very lucky to be coming into the office of president, I also feel the organization is dealing with a lot of urgent situations right now.

I am quite concerned about the revised Department of Public Health Scope of Practice regulations. By substituting the term “licensed health care provider” for “physician”, they have created a potentially dangerous situation for patients where actions such as admissions, discharges, ordering and removing of seclusion and restraint, could be seen to be in the scope of practice of any number of non physician providers. Without the clarity of the word “physician”, it is left up to each institution to interpret the regulations, and so oversight and standardization becomes practically impossible. The California Psychiatric Association is continuing to fight against these revisions, but as the fight moves into the area of litigation, it is quite costly to continue to pursue.

I am also concerned about the future of public mental health care in our state. I work for San Mateo County, and we get a budget update every two weeks. The news is never good. With the California state budget deficits and cuts, providing adequate mental health care to people living here is becoming increasingly challenging. The California Psychiatric Association needs to continue to advocate for sufficient resources to fund public mental health services in our state.

Finally, there are many changes at the national level that the California Psychiatric Association needs to work as a part of the American Psychiatric Association. APA is grappling with issues involving national healthcare reform which will affect all psychiatrists, relationships with pharma, and even its own internal structure. CPA needs to remain active and involved in all of these areas.

With all these issues to work on in the next couple years, I don't see that adding a new direction or new focus to CPA will be a part of my presidency. I do, however, have goals about how we do the work of the CPA. I hope we will work in as collaborative a manner as possible, both within our organization and with other organizations. As it has been felt in the past that national issues sometimes get set to the side as we are dealing with our own urgent state issues, the CPA Council has

elected Bart Blinder to be our APA Area Rep and Joseph Mawhinney to be our APA Area Dep Rep to separate out the national positions from the state ones. Our MIT Representative, Steve Koh, has ideas about how to vitalize resident participation in the CPA and I hope we will make strides there. Our MUR representative, Khushro Unwalla, just finished his term and so I think we will need to be extra careful to consider minority viewpoints as we make decisions. And most of all, we need to hear from you! Peter Forster is heading up an Information Technology committee which may improve our website and communications, but please, consider getting more involved. Write a letter to the editor after you read this newsletter -- I think we had one letter after I wrote about the CMA meeting but what if we had hundreds? Email the office with a story of how one of our legislative efforts affects you. And please consider supporting us financially -- the Advocacy and Litigation fund is going to be very much needed in the next couple years. Give a lot if you can, but if you can't, remember that giving a little also helps. Thank you for all your support, and I do look forward to being your president for the next two years.