

## Spring Presidential Address



It is my pleasure to address the membership for the first time in 2010. Last year we saw tremendous gains in membership, interest and recognition of the BPA. Your interest in the BPA speaks volumes toward your commitment to black mental health and this has not gone unnoticed. With 1 in 6 black psychiatrists being members, it shows the relevance and strength of our organization. We now have comprised a list of black psychiatrists, that is over 1,200 persons. It is not known how many black psychiatrists there are in the United States, but it is estimated to be between 12-14,000. BPA is now in contact with an estimated 90% of black psychiatrists in the continental US and many more abroad. This list has been gathered over the years and through multiple resources. Our electronic presence via emails and facebook has improved our ability to communicate ideas and resources quickly and efficiently. The number of hits to our website is steadily increasing and the ability to communicate our message to the world as well as the world communicating with us has been a remarkable exchange of information.

It is truly an exciting time in psychiatry and medicine. We are witnessing historical changes as we have seen comprehensive health care signed into law in 2010 in addition to the mental health parity act of 2008. This means millions more Americans will be able to access mental health care. This will help decrease prejudice and barriers for those who need and seek mental health treatment. With these recent events, it would seem that persons with mental illness will no longer be discriminated against. Even though there is much promise in recent events, we should still be watchful of what this means for the mental health of African-Americans. The issues of stigma, lack of education, trauma, racism, culturally incompetent care, disparities in diagnosis, treatment and research will be continual issues for African-American patients and their providers. As comprehensive health care was being debated, we saw the continual signs of racism with use of the "N" word. Violent threats of death were yelled by an angry crowd toward black congressional leaders and one black congressional member was spat on. My question is why would people be so angry at black legislatures when most of the individuals voting in favor of the bill are not black? Historically, this raises multiple issues when you look at the history of medicine and psychiatry as it relates to slavery and the disenfranchisement of African-Americans. I question if the debate regarding the national health care bill is much larger than what is being stated in the media. Some of this argument could be based upon the separation of race and class. If you have adequate mental and physical health care, you will live longer and more productive lives and if you do not...the other. More often, African-Americans, the traditionally underserved and the poor do not have adequate health care. I am hopeful this bill will be able to change this. It is obvious that as far as America has changed, much still has not as racism is continually expressed on local and national levels.

At this time we truly look forward to the 2010 Spring Conference in Nashville, Tennessee where we will be honoring the late Dr. Lloyd Elam. The title of the conference is "Leadership, Excellence and Service: Honoring the Life and Legacy of Dr. Lloyd Elam." We are doing this conference in conjunction with the Department of Psychiatry at Meharry Medical College. The conference will be held April 8-11th on the

Meharry Campus. We will begin Thursday night with mental health in the African-American community advocacy program that will specifically target the urban community in Nashville. All are welcome to attend. The conference will officially begin on April 9th. We are looking forward to a wonderful conference. The titles are from a range of subjects that specifically target black mental health issues. Please visit our website [www.blackpsych.org](http://www.blackpsych.org) for more information. This is a conference that you do not want to miss. I ask that you be there versus having to hear about it later and wishing you had come so that you could have experienced it yourself.

It is our goal this year to have over 400 members of the BPA by the end of 2010. I can only do this with your help. We need all members to pay your membership early in the year. You can do this by going to the website and click the tab "Get Involved and Join." It is really that simple. Also, please let a colleague know that you are a member and why you believe it is important to be a member. A few of those reasons are to stay informed about black mental health in the US and the diaspora. Another benefit is to join colleagues in receiving and exchanging professional information on mental health and African-Americans. Also, there are multiple opportunities to network and catch up with colleagues. It is possible that due to African-Americans making up only 2% of all psychiatrists that we do not get an opportunity professionally to be around black psychiatrists. The BPA is an excellent organization in order to do so.

It is truly overwhelming to see the number of organizations that desire to be involved with the BPA. These organizations vary in scope, but many include large and small colleges and universities, private and public organizations, governmental agencies, patients, advocates, families, students, residency trainees and professional members. I would list the names, but the number is too numerous and I would not want to forget anyone. I often believe that much of the membership does not realize how important our voices are as black psychiatrists. The mental health community wants to know our thoughts, ideas and expertise.

I truly look forward to the year of 2010 for BPA. We have made tremendous strides over the years and we have to continue to make even more. Our work is not done by any stretch of the imagination. We are truly our brother's keeper when it comes to black mental health. As president, I need your continued involvement. There is no BPA without all of you being involved, whether your contribution be large or small. All who advocate and promote black mental health are relevant to the BPA.

Be a mentor;  
Be an advocate;  
Be a part of a movement;

## **Be at the 2010 Nashville Spring conference;**

Be a part of the betterment for mental health of Black people;  
Be a part of BPA!!!