



Presidential Address

Summer 2009

I am excited to say that we have met and exceeded our membership marks for the year of 2009. We have more than double our membership for 2008. The Black Psychiatrists of America is celebrating its 40th year anniversary. We continue to grow and gain interest of multiple psychiatrists, students and other mental health organizations that understand the need for mental health care of persons of African descent. We are continually attracting the attention of persons from around the country and the world. We are seeing a dramatic rise in hits to our website and persons asking questions regarding the Black Psychiatrists of America.

We are continually looking forward to our Fall Transcultural Conference that will be held in Cairo and Aswan Egypt November 6-13, 2009. We have many persons who have already registered and purchased the land package. I highly recommend doing this early. Please go to www.blackpsych.org for more information. It will surely be an educational and memorable conference.

As a direct result of the spring conference in New Orleans that specifically targeted undergraduate and medical students, we are getting more request for mentors. The BPA has been invited to attend the Congressional Black Caucus in order for us to mentor persons with interest in mental health as well as those currently matriculating at the undergraduate, medical and resident levels of training. The largest increase has been at the undergraduate ranks. These are mostly African-American students who have a sincere interest in psychiatry, but are having difficulty in getting direction at their local universities. They also realize the special interest and needs of mental health care in persons of African descent, but lack general knowledge, facts and are not educated at their local educational systems. These persons are turning to the BPA for education, mentorship and hope. We have recently received a request to start a membership level for undergraduate students.

The BPA continues to be involved in collaborative efforts. We are forming new relationships at an increasing pace. We are in development of partnering with the Black Mental Health Alliance. We are hoping to increase our database of referrals. As mentioned previously, the most common reason for persons to contact us through our website is for persons looking for Black mental health providers. The Black Mental Health Alliance has many referral networks available and we hope this will enable us to connect patients with providers. If you have not already done so, I encourage all members to email your contact information to bpa4info@aol.com so that we may put you on the referral list. The BPA held meetings at both the APA Spring Conference in San Francisco and NMA Convention in Las Vegas. Both meetings were well attended. The meeting at the APA Spring Conference was very impressive. It was so well attended that hotel staff had to bring extra seating. I was encouraged by seeing six BPA

presidents in one room. The presidents included Drs. Cassandra Newkirk, Shirley Marks, William Lawson, Altha Stewart, Ramona Davis and myself.

We are currently working to further our visibility on the Internet as well as increase our ability to discriminate information. We are in the process of having a BPA Facebook, linked in and Twitter page. It is optional for members to sign on to these pages. We have updated our website so that it will be even more user friendly. Please go to www.blackpsych.org and see what is new. Soon expect to see the BPA 2009 Spring Conference presentations on our website. They will be available for download for free by members and conference attendees. We will have the presentations available to the public for a fee. It is our hope that we will be a source of information for the general public, medical and mental health professionals. Expect a Special Edition Newsletter with the abstracts. We will also soon have an ebook for the entire presentations that were done at the spring conference.

As I end, I want to thank everyone for their continued service to the organization. I know that there are many changes to the health care system that are being proposed. At this time we are attempting to better understand how this will affect Black mental health and those who serve this population. As we can see with the recent arrest of Professor Henry Louis Gates, there is continual racism that is ever present. There are those who would say his arrest had nothing to do with race. I would argue that if that was the case then why is it in continual discussion. Times have changed to where racism is not as overt, but is more covert in the 21st century. Racist attitudes and behavior have matured and adapted. I would also say that there is another change in the offensive behavior of oppression as it relates to persons of African descent. I have noticed an increase in **racial denial** as if race does not matter any more. Many are using the presidency of Barack Obama as a way to say all is equal. In my opinion this denial is a comfortable overt and covert racist behavior that is used as a drape to hide an agenda to push back perceived gains by Blacks in America. Racism continues to plague African-Americans and affect our mental health.

The Black Psychiatrists of America is on the move. We hope that you will be an active participant;

- Be a mentor;
- Be quick to action;
- Be an advocate for mental health;
- Be part of the change that you want to see;
- Be knowledgeable of the issues affecting the mental health of Blacks in America;

Be a part of BPA!