

Editorial

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Colombian Psychiatry: Moments and Challenges

I would like to begin with an acknowledgement to the serious and wise management of my predecessor, Doctor Carlos López.

To assume the presidency of the Colombian Association of Psychiatry has this strange connotation of multiple, sometimes contradictory, feelings that important moments of life have; in practice, things seem simple: to continue the mature and successful lines of work that the organization established some time ago, and to manage new or old situations. The joint importance of these components forces an immediate approach, for which the principles and objectives of the Association always constitute a guide.

Regarding emotions, life makes the chosen one face challenges, responsibilities, introspective looks, questions, doubts... and joys of course, which—because of their innovative character—are resolved and renewed day by day.

To be president of the Association is an honor for me, phrase that—even though it is used so frequently—does not stop being true; an honor, fruit of the generosity of many friends and colleagues. I want to make clear that the annual management is the result of the work of a committee of twelve people, among whom the president is just another member. I have to express my satisfaction and gratitude to Beatriz, Marcela, Sonia, Alfredo, Carlos, Christian, Juan David, Mario, Ramón, Roberto, and Rodrigo, for their company in this process that begins.

The political moment of the Association

We face a moment when complex situations are intensifying in the world, in the country, and in the profession. What happens in a global context is not alien to us, neither in a good sense—for example, the availability of immediate information as well as of the events—, nor in a bad sense, such as the present moment of the economy that some have described as the end of wild Capitalism. This ending week, the spokesman of the International Monetary Fund affirmed that the world is in recession and it is in the worst economic situation in eighty years; a Colombian economist, an expert invited to our Congress, told us that one of the clear effects of this situation for the country will be the loss of jobs; an additional damage for a country that has the highest rate of unemployment in the region.

We know that this type of contexts increases the incidence of diseases that are strongly modified by social surroundings, and it makes the attention of more serious pathologies difficult; in terms of public health, it means more patients, more serious complications in order to take care of them, and less resources due to the crisis; surely, sacrifices have to be made by all of us in general, but especially by professional service providers, a trade that has more and more inequality in its labor situation, as the testimonies presented to the general assembly of the Association demonstrate.

It is a moment then, when all the actors related to mental health are vulnerable; and there is an ethical duty to act like a trade, with the clearest expression our resources allow. As an Association, this moment does not come to us without preparation: the Committee of Policies wrote the policy of the field of mental health, document that establishes the diagnosis, the context and the road toward actions; the Ministry has the word. But it does not mean that our responsibility has finished; the Association has sought to maintain its presence in order to contribute to the application of this proposition.

In addition, we are lucky to have achieved important relationships with control institutions, the ombudsman office, and the office of general attorney; these entities of vigilance have promised to monitor the fulfillment of the policies and have requested that the Association become a consultant. In accordance with the statement of Doctor Edgardo Maya on the day of the inauguration of the Congress, this consultancy will be official with the office of general attorney, through signing an agreement for such effect.

Equally, the Board of Directors of the Association and the trade Committee have begun to make declarations in order to try to modify particular situations in the national geography where the rights and the remunerations of mental health workers are violated. As I mentioned at the beginning, the lines of work already undertaken will be followed by the new Board, with the same seriousness and discipline of our predecessors.

At this moment, there is an ample legislative agenda that is directly incumbent to us: the Law of Human Talent, which has found obstacles in the control of the Court and which is to be regulated, or the prices, principal question for the survival of the system, just to mention the most well-known cases. We will work hard so that the voice of the group is listened to and participate in the decisions.

The disciplinary and scientific moment of psychiatry

While the political moment is critical, the disciplinary and scientific moment is promising; we think about psychiatry with different approaches, tools and resources; the outstanding advances in the scientific analysis of cerebral physiology, of cognition, and of behavior have presented inputs that help us not only to know more about diseases and their treatments, but also to invite philosophy of mind, sociology, pedagogy, and critical historical research to participate in the debate on disease, health and psychiatry. There is a solid theoretical corpus in construction, to which those who are practicing our discipline can contribute. The Association has been participating in the debate, providing settings for different tendencies to be expressed.

This situation—that makes of psychiatry a privileged specialty among the medical ones—, in terms of presence in generating global knowledge, is also a risk that must continuously be supervised by academic debate, with the skepticism that theories deserve in order to be proven; Wittgenstein said: “concepts are formed according to what is comfortable for thinking”; for us, this is a moment of not avoiding incommmodity for the good of the discipline.

Our universities have recognized quality and they reach high levels in the academic development; in this matter, the Association has not been inferior to the circumstances regarding the quality of its events as well as for being the only medical association of the country with a journal that has the highest category in scientific publications in Colombia; an acknowledgement to its director, Doctor Carlos Gómez-Restrepo.

The support to the achievements in this change will be followed by an unrestricted commitment on behalf of the Board, but it is also the moment to think about our global projection: our publications are expected to have international diffusion and we must reach more presence in world-wide associations and organizations which deal with our subjects. We have the firm intention to begin a process that obtains positions of representation for one or several of our associates in those organizations. The work already begun under the leadership of Doctor Rodrigo Córdoba is the first step.

The ethical moment of the Association

This is also an important ethical moment for us. Under the mentioned presidency of Doctor Hernán Santacruz, the bioethics committee of our Association led the drafting of the deontological code which must regulate our behaviors as psychiatrists. Two points are in the focus at the present: the

behavior of professionals with patients and the relationship with pharmaceutical industry. In the first case, there is no possibility to be deaf to the cries of the rights of patients; there is a commitment of vigilance so that the few people who can infringe the adequate therapeutic behavior receive, as a minimum, a moral rejection from their pairs. To listen to the patients, to their associations, will be a commitment of the board; to help them to obtain spaces for claim and for therapeutic aids is a duty of all of our associates.

The relationship between psychiatrists and pharmaceutical houses is in the center of the present controversy; a debate that not only requires our close attention but also our active protagonism. The Association has been careful about making the rules clear; the search for even greater transparencies will imply a respectful dialogue with the entities that, in a historical form, have been our good allies.

The moment of the president

I can say of myself that, as I believe, I have been happy and, without doubts, very lucky. I am proudly pastuso and intensely caleño, in a duality that does not want to be solved.

I come from an affectionate, critical and amusing family. From a practical and dreamer mother who, along with my father, educated seven children. As for me, with the support of my wife, Indira, we are trying to construct an oasis in these difficult times for our three projects of good beings: Valentina, Sebastián, and Santiago, our children. I dedicate to all four of them the public renovation of my love and commitment, and the firm belief that it is also for them that I will entirely fulfill my duties with the Association.

Thanks to my colleagues from Valle; they do not know how sensational are for my life their knowledge, complains, characteristics, and forms of being. I would like to highlight two of them who, in addition to be colleagues, are close friends of mine, Juan Carlos and Eduardo. Thanks for everything.

The affection and knowledge of my family and friends is the best thing that I have to lead the group which, during a year, will direct the activities of the Colombian Association of Psychiatry.

Carlos A. Miranda Bastidas
President
Asociación Colombiana de Psiquiatría