

Colombian Association of Psychiatry Challenges as an Association

I am deeply thankful with God for having granted me the opportunity and responsibility I am assuming today, together with my peers in the Board of Directors, Doctors Jaider Barros, Francisco Cavanzo, Carlos Filizola, Henry García, Hernán Giraldo, Ramón Lopera, Carlos López, Mauricio Moreno, Kris Rey, Juan Carlos Rojas and Gustavo Zambrano, to face during the current year the challenges and daily activities of the Colombian Association of Psychiatry. I understand the work of the Presidency as the position with the greatest responsibility since I should be directing all efforts of the Board, now representing each of you, in order to be able to continue with the mandates of the Assembly.

This year, 2011, we celebrate our first fifty years as an Association. The intense activity of the last four days has led us to recall our origins, our history and, of course, to re-evaluate our future. Yesterday morning, during the symposium on the History of the Association, there came a moment when I had the feeling that time had stood still. In the description given by Dr. Cesar González, one of the main topics of the First Congress, in 1961, included the defense of psychiatry and an active participation in political decisions made in Colombia concerning mental health. I felt certain that if I had been a psychiatrist fifty years ago, I would have embraced, together with those pioneers, the ideal of associating ourselves for struggling to attain goals so noble. It was a very curious moment during which I could not remain silent and felt the need to whisper to the colleague next to me: "Nothing has changed". Up to now it has been so. The fact of being associated grants us the force and authority to raise our voice and express opinions concerning the human health situation in our community which evolves within a particular historic context while limited by the political, economical and social features of the country.

Those of us, attending the debate on mental health with the participation of Dra. Paola Acosta - Vice-Minister of Health, Dra. Alba Pinilla - Member of the House of Representatives, Dr. Pedro Ruiz - President of the WPA, Dr. Rodrigo Córdoba - President of the Colombian Association of Scientific Associations and Dr. José Del Carmen Bornacelly- President of the Colombian Association of Psychiatry, can but feel alarmed considering the relevance of elements at stake which prevent approaching the

subject of mental health, in a country with 0.1% of the total domestic budget allocated to this issue, a country characterized by violence, where alcohol consumption is the sponsor of health and education, a country trying to acknowledge the right to health Colombians should have by means of an Act, after 200 years of Independence, a country that started to be familiar with the term integral mental health just a year ago. Article 65 of Act 1438, states:

“Health actions should include guarantee for the full exercise of the right Colombians have to mental health through integral attention in order assure satisfaction of health needs and their care as part of the Healthcare Plan and the implementation, following-up and evaluation of the national mental health policy.”

Current condition of our profession makes us swim against the tide.

Nowadays in our history, the third object of our by-laws becomes all-important. i.e.: *“the Association shall have critical, active and permanent presence in any issue related to mental health, attention and care of the mentally diseased...”*

Nowadays we are benefited by the activity developed by the Colombian Association of Scientific Associations, of which the Colombian Association of Psychiatry is an active member that, in turn, decisively contributes with good acceptance in the different governmental environments.

So far, the practice of psychiatry has been limited to the attention of people with mental diseases. In this aspect, psychiatry has produced unquestionable achievements in the etiopathologic understanding of mental diseases, their description and diagnosis as well as in the therapeutic field. Such aspects of psychiatry are at risk of remaining simple theoretical references if the application field for all this knowledge prevents their practice. If the context within which Psychiatry is practiced continues to be amidst unfavorable conditions, lacking an adequate application context and with absence of promotion and care policies regarding mental health, my dear colleagues, this would lead us nowhere else but to a state of physical and spiritual depletion, sooner or later, the coexistence with so much suffering and frustration would end up by extinguishing the pleasure and creativity that must characterize our profession.

Our people are in urgent need of a deep transformation in the mental health reality and this requires the joint efforts of many sectors and forms of knowledge. The Colombian Association of Psychiatry, as the institution gathering most psychiatrists in Colombia, must assume a leading role in such transformation. As associates, I wish to invite you to be both witnesses and participants in this responsibility, within the regions and environments where our profession is practiced. I ask you to trustfully inquire at our

offices about any concern regarding advances in mental health strategies as well as any difficulty you may encounter in your professional activities. Such concerns shall immediately be addressed to the Board of Directors you have elected, and to the Association's committees and working groups of the Association so as to find the corresponding answers and solutions.

On the other hand, and looking now inside the Colombian Association of Psychiatry, I would like to make emphasis upon the consideration that the power gained by our profession in the last years shall be ever greater if we include ourselves, in the first singular and plural person, to contribute with our opinions and voices, as with our problems and solutions. The Professional Committee is not conformed just by some of us; instead it should be made by all of us. We must continue strengthening this pillar of the Association. Sometimes just a voice is needed for all of us to be its echo, showing that we are not alone, that we are supportive of every psychiatrist in any latitude of our country and that an encouraging voice shall reach there, together with solution alternatives discussed and expressed through official channels to satisfy our needs.

Although in essence problems remain, new communication tools offer advantages we must use properly, such as in the case of the greater participation achieved for the electing the members of the Board of Directors. It was a process with setbacks and we regret the discomfort caused; we commit ourselves to work in the permanent updating of the data base so as to maintain an optimum information flow among associates. The Assembly has mandated the modernization of this diffusion means. I invite you to include in your "favorite markers" the Colombian Association of Psychiatry website since it is a first-class tool for the defense of the profession; well informed, we are less vulnerable.

You should bear in mind that as associates you have a second home at the headquarters of the Colombian Association, the destiny of the Association is traced by all of us, in our hands rests the responsibility of being members of this Board of Directors. Personally and on behalf of the new Board, I emphasize on our obligation to comply and strive for the compliance of our by-laws, to keep you informed, and to be attentive to problems associates may have in every corner of the country.

I have referred in my speech to the professional and social objects of the Association; however, I must also refer, with great satisfaction, to the consistency achieved in the academic and scientific fields, thanks in particular to the efforts and organization of the Scientific Committee that has made of this, the Fiftieth Colombian Congress of Psychiatry, a fully successful event.

I wish to dedicate to my family the honor I receive today, to my son David Salomon who has lived with psychiatry since very early in his life.

When he was in his first year of primary school I was on my first internship year. He has shared and endured with me many satisfactions and some frustrations inherent to this profession. Thank you so much, dear son, gift from God and seed of my inspiration, thank you for your patience and understanding. Thank you, Dad, for your example with your commitment as a lifelong ideal and principle. This is to you also, Mother, to you who lovingly know how to bring down to earth some ideas and raptures. To my sister, her husband and their children, the strength of that family to which I also do belong. And now, to finish, I wish to acknowledge and give thanks to my great friend José del Carmen Bornacelly, not only for his excellent performance in the presidency but for every morning recess during which I smoke a cup of coffee and he drinks a cigarette while we daydream and make plans to fix the world, in particular regarding the situation of psychiatrists in Colombia.

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