

President-Elect Post 2020 for the WPA

Work Intentions by Prof. Danuta Wasserman

I am a Professor of Psychiatry at Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden and have extensive experience in administration of scientific and clinical organisations as the former president of the International Academy of Suicide Research (IASR), the former president of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA) with 44 National European Psychiatric Associations and as the director for the WHO Collaborating Centre. I also have experience as a chief clinical psychiatrist at Stockholm County Council clinic at the National Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention of Mental Ill-Health (NASP) in Stockholm.

Vision

I would like to share with you my vision for the World Psychiatric Association (WPA).

The wealth of experience and cultural richness of the WPA is humbling and I am honoured to run for the position of President-Elect. I believe that the WPA is uniquely positioned to improve mental health worldwide and the collective wisdom from each member society is needed for this.

So, what does that mean in the concrete terms? A number of things.

WPA as the key partner to the United Nations Agenda 2030

If elected, I will work with the United Nations (UN) to use the WPA as a key partner on their agenda of 17 goals for Sustainable Development for a better future for all in 2030.

I believe that the WPA should give guidance to the UN first and foremost in regard to goal number 3 about health and wellbeing with suicide rates as the indicator of progress, to achieve reduction of the Global Burden of Mental Disorders.

The WPA should also contribute to goal number 10 on reducing inequality, and making sure no one is left behind. Vulnerable populations across the world include people with mental health disorders. Mental health stigma, hate speech targeting the mentally ill and discrimination is widespread. In the psychiatric community, we know from experience that it is very possible, even if difficult, to do something about such inequities and stigma.

This brings me to goal number 17 about partnership between governments, the private sector and civil society in achieving global and regional results.

Partnerships in defeating negative effects on mental health during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

We are in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak and the impact of the pandemic on global mental health is significant and will continue to be for a long time. There is no guide and no timeframe. This causes uncertainty, stress and anxiety.

Psychological distress, sleeping problems, depression, anxiety, and PTSD are on the upsurge both in the general population, among first responders and in psychiatric patients.

People across the world are facing the grief of losing loved ones and not being able hold them close at the end of their lives. They also face the missed opportunity of an in-person funeral to collectively address this grief.

Many face the grim reality of the financial impact of employment or wages lost. The repercussions of economic hardship extend to our wellbeing. From a long-term perspective, suicides may increase. This will require a long-lasting and holistic response from WPA member societies and the UN to achieve the 2030 goals. I am preparing a policy document about suicide prevention on behalf of the Section of Suicidology at the WPA. The document will be distributed to all WPA National Psychiatric Associations.

Five-continent collaborative research trial

From my previous work I know that urgent action is needed to address health emergencies like the current pandemic. For many years I chaired the Department of Global Health Sciences at Karolinska Institute and was responsible for the management of global health epidemics like HIV, SARS and Ebola and their effect on mental health.

This led me now to undertake a five-continent collaboration to study global similarities and regional specificities on mental health and suicidal behaviours in response to the specific clinical and awareness increasing intervention during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the five-continent Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) called SUPRE-MISS (Suicide Prevention Multisite Intervention Study on Suicidal Behaviours) during COVID-19 we will partner with patient and family organisations, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and National Psychiatric Associations in 12 countries so far from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. This project on which the WPA will capitalise is attractive for sponsors, as Karolinska Institute, which award the Nobel prize in physiology and medicine each year, is the leading partner.

Experiences will be shared in webinar forums to elucidate the advantages and obstacles in different mental health care organisations, and cultures treating people with mental disorders.

The motto of this project is to acquire knowledge globally, and adapt it and act regionally.

Stimulate Innovation

Models of innovation that promote diagnostic and treatment methods such as telemedicine, digital based therapies adjusted for cultural, linguistic, and economical aspects, will be developed using the newest technological means in the above-mentioned inter-continental SUPRE-MISS COVID-19 project. They will be made available for the WPA and its national member associations.

The results of this study will also give the opportunity to translate scientific results to clinical every day work, policies and public mental health community actions, those in turn will feed into the development of new and innovative scientific projects bringing knowledge and practice to the next level. This will improve services for patients and their families.

Ethics

I work in the field of Psychiatric Ethics with focus on quality of treatments, especially the coercive ones on psychiatric patients' human rights and ethical values behind treatment priorities in different conditions. In this context, strengthening the rights of psychiatrists is of the utmost importance. Courses in leadership for clinical psychiatrists and early-career psychiatrists, especially for countries where mental health is not yet a priority in collaboration with world leading academic institutions can be a way for change and strengthening the psychiatrists' identity.

Education

Education is the golden gate to a better future. I am interested in developing, with the WPA member societies, educational programmes for master and PhD students in low-middle and high income countries, as well as mental health care programmes for clinical psychiatrists with a focus on suicide prevention at leading academic institutions worldwide.

Continuous Medical Education (CME) courses at the WPA Congresses or as webinars online to improve early detection, diagnostics and treatment both with psychopharmacological, psychological and psychosocial rehabilitation measures is another educational track which should be further developed. Courses in basic psychiatric conditions to strengthen the liaison between medical and mental health organisations can be an additional educational track.

The road for the future

I will build upon ambitions and achievements of previous and present leaders of the WPA to preserve the best from the past, and move forward at the same time seeking new solutions based on the best science and practice in collaboration with the UN and centres of excellence in science and clinical practices worldwide.

I believe that my scientific, clinical, pedagogical and administrative experiences, paired with the strong support from my home institution, Karolinska Institute, can contribute to both the development of new activities, the maintenance of the best old ones at the WPA and can lead to great opportunities to improve mental health globally and for each member society locally.

As president I am confident that we as a worldwide community can together find solutions and embark on a world psychiatric mission to improve mental health based on the best science, practice, and technology available.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules in these difficult times to read my vision for the WPA. I hope that we will all be able to meet in real life soon.

With kind regards,

Danuta Wasserman MD., PhD.,

Professor in Psychiatry and Suicidology at Karolinska Institute

Stockholm, Sweden