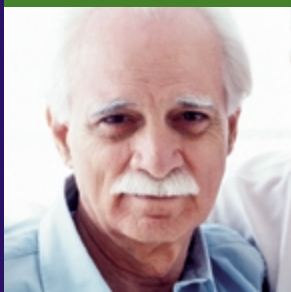
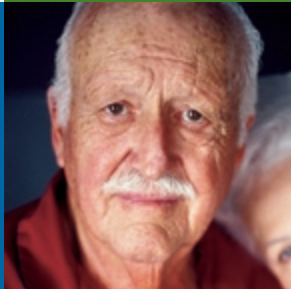
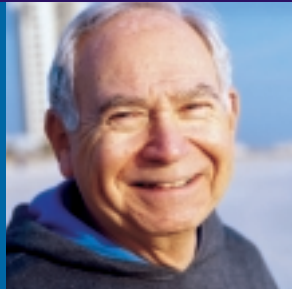


25th Anniversary 25th Anniversary 25th Anniversary



Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Older Adults

25 YEARS of the
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
FOR GERIATRIC PSYCHIATRY
1978-2003



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The Association's Mission

The American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry is dedicated to promoting the mental health and well-being of older people and improving the care of those with late-life mental disorders. The AAGP's mission is to enhance the knowledge base and standard of practice in geriatric psychiatry through education and research and to advocate for meeting the mental health needs of older adults.

In 1978, as interest in mental health and the process of aging grew, and older adults were increasing in number and as a percentage of the U.S. population, a small group of visionaries met to discuss late-life mental health needs and the field of geriatric psychiatry. From this meeting, the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry (AAGP) was born. What began as the vision of 11 leaders in the field of psychiatry grew to a society of several hundred by the end of its first year. Today, the AAGP is an established membership association of nearly 2,000 geriatric psychiatrists and other health care professionals in the United States, Canada, and abroad, dedicated to the mental well-being of older adults.

In the 1970s, national attention was increasingly focused on both the unique health needs of the elderly and the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses. For the first time, the federal government was examining the mental health needs of older Americans; reports were issued by the President's Commission on Mental Health's Task Panel on the Mental Health of the Elderly and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare's Committee on Mental Health and Mental Illness of the Elderly.

In 1974, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) was established to help understand the nature of aging and to extend the healthy, active years of life. Robert N. Butler, M.D., a psychiatrist, was appointed director. One year later, the Center for Studies of the Mental Health of the Aging at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) was created to support and coordinate research, clinical training projects, and research training. Gene Cohen, M.D., Ph.D., also a psychiatrist, was made chief.

There was little focus on geriatric psychiatry before the 1970s with the exception of the works of the Boston Society for Gerontologic Psychiatry, the Society for Life Cycle Psychology and Aging in Chicago, and Duke University in North Carolina, which offered the only gero-psychiatry fellowship program in the country.

“We started to notice a change of attitude,” explained Sanford Finkel, M.D., AAGP founding president. “Older doctors in the United States—psychiatrists and otherwise—began to talk about the fact that they were aging, and they needed to understand more about psychogeriatric problems. Younger psychiatrists and other professionals began to state that we have to prepare for our own future. Not only do we have the concerns about our parents and grandparents, but we want to have a life down the road, where illnesses like depression and dementia and others are managed, if not prevented.”

The sessions on aging offered at the 1978 meeting of the American Psychiatric Association indicated that a strong interest in geriatric psychiatry had emerged. Nearly 1,600 attended the opening session on psychopharmacology in the elderly, more than 1,000 participated in a half-day workshop on promising new directions for the elderly, and hundreds listened to NIA Director Robert Butler.

In response to this interest, training in geriatric psychiatry was being established in the 1970s. Both the NIMH Center for Studies of the Mental Health of the Aging and the Veterans Administration began to allocate funding for programs in geriatric psychiatry and research. “With all this activity, there was an explosion of information,” according to Finkel, “and there needed to be a mechanism in which to disseminate this information to the increasing number of psychiatrists and other professionals who were interested in this area.”

Geriatric Mental Health Foundation

The Geriatric Mental Health Foundation, a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization, was established by the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry to raise awareness of psychiatric and mental health disorders affecting the elderly. The Foundation’s vision for America’s aging population includes:

- Increased public awareness of the importance of mental health in the aging population,
- Removal of stigmas for those seeking mental health services,
- Increased access to quality mental health care for the elderly, and
- Promotion of healthy aging strategies for all seniors, family caregivers, and others devoted to the overall health of our communities.

The Foundation focuses on public education targeted to the health care consumer and family caregiver about mental illness prevention and treatment and mental health promotion. The Foundation also develops programs to enhance communication and foster broad collaboration among the geriatric mental health research community and mental health care providers on behalf of the general public.