

The Affiliate Member Program

In 2000, the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry opened its doors to mental health professionals outside the community of geriatric psychiatrists, allowing 50 non-psychiatrists to join a year. Affiliate members devote a significant portion of their time to the field of geriatrics and have an advanced degree. As of December 2002, the association benefited from the inclusion of 150 affiliate members.

Partnership for Grassroots Advocacy

To inform and involve the general membership in the association's advocacy initiatives, the AAGP launched a grassroots-lobbying network in 2001. Called the Partnership for Grassroots Advocacy, the network is designed to encourage association members to contact their U.S. senators and representatives on critical legislative and regulatory issues that impact geriatric psychiatrists and their patients. To learn more about the Partnership for Grassroots Advocacy, visit www.AAGPonline.org or call the AAGP at 301-654-7850.

AN ASSOCIATION IS BORN

During the 1978 American Psychiatric Association (APA) annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, a small group of geriatric psychiatrists met to discuss forming a national organization. Among them were Drs. Robert Butler, Monica Blumenthal, Gene Cohen, Carl Eisdorfer, Sanford Finkel, Lissy Jarvik, William Gershell, Eric Pfeiffer, Alexander Simon, Alan Whanger, and Raymond Vickers—all leaders in their field. The association was formed to give geriatric psychiatrists “an opportunity to share their ideas with colleagues; advocate for support services, education, research, and program development for older people with mental disorders; and develop a sense of identity,” reflected Sanford Finkel, the driving force behind the AAGP's creation.

“It was necessary to have an organization to draw attention to the needs of geriatric psychiatry patients, which are different from those of younger patients,” founding member Lissy Jarvik, M.D., explained. “People felt that those who knew the situation needed to draw attention to geriatric psychiatry to help the patients and educate people—primarily psychiatrists and other mental health professionals.”

The group's initial goals were to: (1) disseminate information to psychiatrists who care for the elderly, (2) increase the attention of the APA on aging with particular focus on services, training, research, and policy development, and establish a major component within APA on aging and mental health, and (3) encourage the development of local societies throughout the country whose concerns were with the mental health aspects of aging.

The initial membership drive began with letters of invitation sent to 1,700 psychiatrists who had indicated an interest in geriatrics or gerontology in the 1977 APA Bibliographical Information Book. By the end of the year, approximately 300 psychiatrists and psychiatrists-in-training had joined. “There was immediate recognition from virtually all the nationally recognized leaders in geriatric psychiatry,” Finkel said. “They became officers and members of the board of directors.”



Sanford Finkel
AAGP President, 1978–1981



Lissy Jarvik
AAGP President, 1984–1985