

# APA Media Campaign Educates Public About Psychiatry

May, which is Mental Health Month, is a fitting time for APA to launch a multipronged public education campaign designed to raise the profile of psychiatrists and the range of treatments they provide.

BY KEN HAUSMAN

The American public will be seeing—and hearing—quite a bit of APA this month as the Association kicks off a nationwide effort to educate the public about the importance of mental health in their lives and the professionals who can best treat them when mental health problems arise.

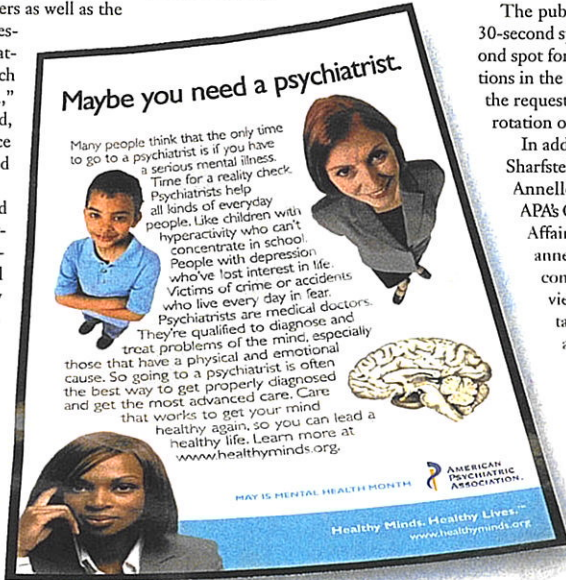
The new campaign, titled “Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives,” is designed to reach the media and policymakers as well as the general public with the message that “psychiatric treatment works and seeking such help is a sign of strength,” said Lydia Sermons-Ward, director of the APA Office of Communications and Public Affairs.

“This campaign should help us tell the story of psychiatry and of our members,” said APA Medical Director James H. Scully Jr., M.D. “For too long we have left it to others to define who we are and what we do.”

The launch of the education effort coincides with Mental Health Month and involves public service announcements on radio and television stations and print ads in *Newsweek* and *Family Circle* magazines (see the print ad at right).

The goal of the campaign, which APA is de-

veloping in conjunction with the public-relations firm Porter-Novelli, is to undo the long-entrenched stereotypes and stigma attached to mental illness and the people who suffer from it (*Psychiatric News*, January 7). A key part of this, Sermons-Ward said, is to reach the people who make health care decisions for their household with the message that a psychiatrist is the professional most highly trained to help when mental health issues are a concern in the family.



This advertisement will appear in *Newsweek* and *Family Circle* magazines this month as part of APA's campaign to educate the public about psychiatrists and the disorders they are uniquely skilled to treat.



At the March meeting of the APA Board of Trustees, Lydia Sermons-Ward, director of the Office of Communications and Public Affairs, details some of the strategies and programs that will be integral to the new public-education campaign whose tag line is “Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives.”

The public service announcements—a 30-second spot for television and a 60-second spot for radio—have been sent to stations in the 50 largest media markets with the request that they be included in their rotation of such announcements.

In addition, early this month Steven Sharfstein, M.D., APA president-elect; Annelle Primm, M.D., director of APA's Office of Minority and National Affairs; and consumer advocate Dianne Dorlester were scheduled to conduct a series of satellite interviews about psychiatry and mental illness with the hosts of radio and television shows. Those stations can broadcast the satellite feed live or play the interview at a future date.

Results of a telephone survey recently conducted for APA in which 1,020 adults indicated their opinion of psychiatrists were sent to reporters, editors, and columnists at media outlets in those same markets (see box below).

APA also plans to use this month's annual meeting in Atlanta as a forum for

gaining considerable attention for the campaign, Sermons-Ward noted. She is trying to set up a meeting, for example, with editors and reporters of Atlanta's largest newspaper, the *Journal-Constitution*. Banners and information about the public-education effort will be visible throughout the convention center and other annual meeting venues.

APA's district branches are also a crucial component of the campaign's success, she pointed out. All of them were sent a “toolkit” in April that includes copies of the public service announcements and print ad, a press release with key messages about the campaign, a list of “talking points,” and information that people can access on the APA Web site. That Web site, <www.psych.org>, includes a link to the campaign's Web site at <www.HealthyMinds.org>.

Sermons-Ward hopes that psychiatrists are enthusiastic about the new campaign and realize that they can play a large part in advancing its goals. The campaign's success will be enhanced if psychiatrists carry its messages to the gatekeepers of health care in particular, she noted. She described those gatekeepers as most often being women aged 30 to 54 who determine whether they or a family member receive care for a mental health problem. ■

## Americans Speak Their Minds

To help frame the message in its new “Healthy Minds. Healthy Lives” public education campaign, APA commissioned a telephone survey of a random sample of adults aged 18 and older that explored their attitudes toward psychiatrists and mental health professionals and their views on mental illness and its treatment. A total of 1,020 respondents completed the survey, which was conducted from March 31 through April 3 by the American Staffing Association using a survey developed by Opinion Research Corporation.

The survey found that most of the respondents viewed psychiatry with a neutral to positive attitude—only 13 percent said they have a negative opinion of psychiatrists—and that years of efforts to reduce the stigma preventing people from seeking mental health care are paying off. The results also showed, however, how much work needs to be done to educate the public about the role of psychiatrists and the treatments they provide.

Here are some of the survey's findings:

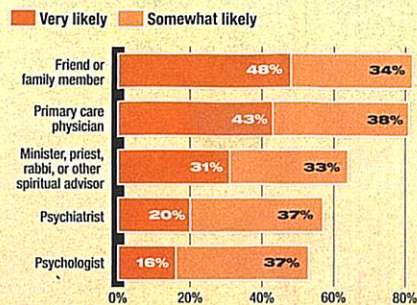
- 33 percent of respondents characterized their view of psychiatrists as “very” or “somewhat” positive, while 13 percent had negative views. The remaining 54 percent had a neutral view or said they “weren't sure” or “weren't familiar” with psychiatry (see chart on page 1). For comparison, 79 percent said they had a positive view of primary care physicians.

- Women had a slightly more positive view of psychiatrists, with 37 percent giving a positive response compared with 31 percent of men.
- 81 percent of younger (aged 35-45) respondents believe that treatments for mental health are effective, while 70 percent of those aged 65 and above hold such a belief.
- More younger than older respondents (72 percent vs. 59 percent) agreed with the statement that seeing a psychiatrist is a sign of strength.
- 75 percent said that they knew that psychiatrists were medical doctors, though 38 percent also said that psychologists were medical doctors.
- 33 percent said they or a family member had seen a psychiatrist. About the same percentage said they had seen a psychologist.
- 18 percent said they would not see a psychiatrist under any circumstance, and 23 percent indicated the same for seeing a psychologist.
- 89 percent said they believe people with a mental illness can lead healthy lives.
- 75 percent agreed that mental illness can result from a chemical imbalance in the brain.
- 80 percent said they believe that treatment for mental illness works, but considerable skepticism remains, with 52 percent saying they “somewhat” agreed with such a belief and 28 percent saying they “strongly” agreed.
- 33 percent said they believe that medications prescribed for psychiatric illnesses do more harm than good.

- 22 percent said they believe that the only people who would benefit from a psychiatrist's care are those with serious mental illnesses.
- 43 percent of respondents who think they or a family member needs mental health care said they were “very” likely to seek it from a primary care physician, while just 20 percent said they were “very” likely to turn to a psychiatrist.

## Seeking Help

How likely is it that you would seek help from each of these people to address emotional or mental health concerns?



Source: Porter Novelli, 2005