



Psychiatry and Religion: A Plea for Consensus

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Letter to the Editor

A World Psychiatric Association (WPA) Position Statement on Spirituality and Religion (R/S) in Psychiatry was published in February 2016 [1]. The publication of this WPA Position Statement is remarkable; therefore it would be unfortunate if this event were to remain unnoticed. The WPA Position statement is a clear and comprehensive challenge for psychiatry to not only recognize that religion and spirituality is significant to many patients, but to appreciate how it should inform our work with them and their communities [2,3].

The American Psychiatric Association was the first professional psychiatric association to publish guidelines regarding to religion and psychiatric practice [4]. It had a typical ethical interest: possible conflicts between psychiatrists' religious commitments and psychiatric practice. The current statement has a different structure, based on five considerations: the importance of the topic for the further development of psychiatry and the profession across the world; the availability of scientific evidence; the expressed needs of WPA member Societies; the public visibility of the topic; and the likelihood that the absence of an expressed consensus of the WPA on a particular issue may lead to decisions or practices harmful to psychiatry or to persons suffering from mental disorders [5]. Since a first draft of the WPA statement was published in 2010 several national associations have approved similar position statements (The Royal College of Psychiatrists, South African Society of Psychiatrists, German Association for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics) [6].

By endorsing this statement, the Executive Committee of the World Psychiatric Association has recognized the many worldwide clinical and research contributions in this area. Nevertheless, most advances have yet to be widely implemented or coordinated, so that the WPA Position Paper also offers valuable encouragement and direction in moving forward.

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