

The Ethical Failure of our Time

Special Commentary by Bram Fridhandler, PhD
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In March 2007, historian Alfred McCoy spoke at the Wright Institute in Berkeley on psychologists' involvement in abusive interrogation from the Cold War to the present. Dr. Stephen Behnke, Director of the APA Ethics Office, was in the audience. I sat a few rows behind him. After McCoy described the finite list of abusive techniques employed, Behnke asked whether a prohibition on psychologists' participation on those techniques would be effective in stopping participation in torture. McCoy said it would. In the context of suspicion that APA had deliberately left loopholes in its prohibitions of abuse, it was an electrifying moment. When the APA Council of Representatives subsequently approved this same prohibition, the sequence of events seemed to corroborate statements by Behnke and others that APA's opposition to abuse was unified, determined, and genuine.

But APA emails produced for the independent review commissioned by APA (the Hoffman Report) show that at the time of McCoy's talk Behnke was almost two years into a secret consultation with Dr. Morgan Banks in the Department of Defense (DoD) (Hoffman, et al., 2015a). Six months before the presentation, Behnke and Banks had conferred on an APA prohibition of participation in specific techniques (Hoffman, et al., 2015b) with Banks indicating that such a prohibition would not create difficulties (Hoffman, et al. 2015c). Whatever Behnke's motives at the Wright Institute that day, he, and through him APA, were operating within bounds already approved in secret by a representative of the DoD.

When psychology needed to take a position on participation in national security interrogations it was natural that APA, including its Ethics Office and Ethics Committee, should be at the center of the process. No other organization could claim to articulate the values of the profession.

The involvement of Ethics Director Behnke, Ethics Committee Vice-Chair Dr. Olivia Moorehead-Slaughter, and President-Elect Dr. Gerald Koocher, author of a textbook on ethics, seemed to assure the integrity of the process. The shattering revelation of the Hoffman report is that the involvement of these ethicists, especially Behnke, contributed not to the integrity of the process, but to its corruption.



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California psychologists. In 2011 he received the CPA Silver Psi award. He has taught at UCSF, the University of San Francisco and Alliant University and was Director of Internship Training at California Pacific Medical Center. He practices psychotherapy and family law forensic psychology in downtown San Francisco.

"As I write, my four years as Ethics Chair are coming to an end. It has been an honor."

After this profound failure, a reasonable question is whether APA has the capacity to reform itself into an organization fit to guide the ethics of the field. From this perspective, most developments have been promising.

As difficult a step as it must have been, leaders of APA staff, including Behnke, were promptly fired or asked to retire. A commission to recommend major changes in APA ethics processes is being formed. The Council of Representatives resoundingly approved a prohibition on participation in any national security interrogation. Already, though, there is cause for concern in APA's failure to acknowledge that the Council's prohibition is unenforceable until the Ethics Code is revised, with no word as to when, or even whether, this will be accomplished.

In the words of the CPA Board's letter to its counterpart at APA (to which I contributed), "Over the past decade, the actions of central figures within APA have caused physical and

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Central Coast Psych Assn ended 2015 with a social whirl and is off to an exciting start in 2016. Dr. Judy Dietch organized the annual CCPA Fall Potluck, which was well attended by members and their significant others, and the Member Dine Outs continue to be a large success. In January, an Installation and General Membership dinner/meeting is scheduled to install the following officers: Drs. Hannah Roberts, President; Babak Tehrani, Past President and Hellen Wood, Treasurer. CCPA is looking forward to another year of social and educational opportunities, increased membership, and improved community involvement.

Los Angeles County Psych Assn's 2016 theme is "Professional Advocacy: Do a Lot by Doing a Little More." Various committees, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and clubs of LACPA, continue to highlight the importance of integrating issues of professional advocacy into the mainstream of our thinking. LACPA's community outreach effort, *Mirrors of the Mind*, is celebrating its 4th year and continues to be well received by the mental health community. Our CE Committee has an impressive line-up of presenters for 2016. Apart from the intellectual, advocacy and networking related activities, LACPA is addressing the self-care needs of the members through our hiking, book, and film clubs.

Napa/Solano Psych Assn welcomes the new year under the presidency of Dr. Markley Sutton. Out-going officers and worker bees were recognized at an elegant dinner in December. We looked back on the year of monthly networking opportunities, Red Cross training, and involvement in advocacy. What will 2016 bring? Check out our website at napapsychologists.org and find out!

Orange County Psych Assn in August joined family practice MDs at their annual picnic and in September we worked with CPA to host an all-day Risk Management Training and hosted a booth at the convention held by the local chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. October saw the second-annual OCPA Convention. November included a talk by attorney Lee Blumen while December included an excellent neuropsychology training and our annual Christmas party. Psychologist karaoke (truly fun), and early-evening networking events at restaurants remain staples of the chapter.

San Diego Psych Assn had 97 members attend the 2015 Fall Conference with an additional 20 at our Awards luncheon. This year, SDPA honored the following: Brian Maienschein, California Assembly Member: Legislative/Public Official of the Year Award; Tom Horvath, PhD, Past-President, SDPA Fellow, Founder/Practical Recovery: Distinguished Contribution to

Psychology Award; JR Mahon, Executive Director Fox 5 News: Media Award; and John Rogers, MD, Cardiologist and founder/Sudden Cardiac Arrest Association: Local Hero Award. We also awarded two new SDPA Fellows: Linda Altes, PhD, SDPA 2013 Past-President, and Joel Lazar, PhD, 2011 Past-President.

San Mateo County Psych Assn has a new President Elect, Dr. David Silverman, who has served on the Board of CPA's Division V - Psychopharmacology. We added "Promoting Your Specialties" to our meeting which entails brainstorming with members to build their practices. This dovetails with our efforts, led by our Website & Marketing Chair, Dr. Larry Feinstein, to make our website more marketing friendly. Our CE and public presentations have been rich and diverse thanks to Drs. Neil Hersh, Steven Tolkin, and Anna Nedelisky, and have included LGBT youth, collegial relationships, technology and practice, and medical issues. We also hosted a CPA sponsored Ethics & Risk Management workshop.

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mental suffering, have wounded psychologists, and damaged our profession. It is now incumbent on APA to act in a manner that will restore the integrity not only of APA but of our profession." ■

REFERENCES

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