

May 28, 2020

We hope this message finds you and those you love and care for well, as we continue through these unprecedented and very difficult times. Although spring has finally arrived, we are still dealing very much with the ongoing challenges that COVID-19 has generated for us all, as individuals, as group psychotherapists, as members of our larger communities, and as members of AGPA. It is in this spirit that we are writing to you now to bring you up-to-date on some important issues.

Through our members and our listservs, we have learned much about the trajectory of COVID-19 and we have been heartened to see news of recovery and return to function, albeit much more slowly for some, than we ever would have anticipated. As the physical effects of COVID-19 begin to recede, the psychological impacts continue to be with us prominently; and look to be part of our lives going forward for some time.

We are heartened that as a community, we have marshaled all of our resources to respond to the daunting challenges that COVID-19 has presented. The Public Affairs Committee and Community Outreach Task Force have been very active and responsive. We have used our listservs as vehicles for communication, support, compassion, and care. It is in this spirit that we extended the AGPA Connect 2020 listserv until the end of May and extended AGPA membership to all attendees for three months so they would be able to participate on this listserv. That listserv as of June 1st will merge with our general membership listserv. We are pleased that people have utilized it in the spirit intended.

Through this period of time, we have supported our members through extensive use of e-learning in a range of domains. Notably through the E-Learning Task Force and iSIG we have provided training and support to help our members move their groups online, in this huge natural experiment of changes to practice. We will seize the opportunity to learn from this transition in practice, as our Research SIG and in partnership with APA Division 49, is launching an online survey aimed at capturing therapists' experience in this transition. We hope to understand what the challenges and opportunities are working online, and also use this data to advocate for continued funding support for online care. We will also gather information and resources to help our members as we transition back to in-person treatment, over this next extended period of time. We have also provided e-learning opportunities for our members to learn about and implement groups to support frontline healthcare workers, honoring the tradition of AGPA as being responsive to traumatic events that affect society at large.

That leads us to an important component of this message: planning for AGPA Connect 2021. AGPA leadership, the Executive Committee, and the AGPA Board of Directors have been in intensive deliberations with the AGPA Connect 2021 leadership and committee to address the question of what kind of meeting can we plan for 2021.

At every step, we remain mindful of the trust our members place in us to make decisions that are wise and right for the members and our organization.

It is with this in mind that we are making the decision to move AGPA Connect 2021 to a virtual meeting. This is a big step and one that we do not take lightly. The AGPA Board makes this recommendation with unanimity.

We recognize that this will be a painful loss because we will not have the opportunity to be together in person in Washington. But we see this as a “necessary loss,” in order to ensure the health of our members and the health of the organization. We cannot at this point in time predict what will be possible in February 2021 with regard to travel, conferences, and large gatherings. It is evident to date that our own members are feeling this uncertainty. This is reflected in low rates of submissions and pre-registration. We have therefore determined that it is best to end people’s uncertainty and ambivalence about the nature of the meeting and put all of our resources into having a spectacular, virtual meeting.

We have the benefit of a long lead time to plan, rather than needing to make a decision late in the planning cycle. That would be incredibly disruptive and costly. Other organizations have been forced to do what we are doing and we will learn from their experiences about best practices for virtual meetings. Our experience with e-learning, has reinforced for us that we can provide meaningful training and education online, including experiential learning as well. There is much that needs to be addressed but we are optimistic that with clarity of direction and singularity of purpose we will be able to proceed effectively. In prior communications we have noted the importance of our capacity to hold the dialectic of caution and hope; of threat and opportunity. We will hold that dialectic as we proceed.

We are incredibly grateful to Katie Steele and Tom Stone and the entire AGPA Connect Committee for taking on this big shift in plans for the meeting. Our joint aim is to have the best and most successful AGPA Connect 2021 meeting that is possible. **We hope that you will use this information about our new plan to consider how you will participate through presenting at and attending the conference. The Call for Program Submission deadline is being extended again to June 30th to invite your participation. Look for more information about next steps in the communications to follow from Katie and Tom.**

We thank you for your commitment to your clients, to your communities, to one another, to the work of group psychotherapy, and to the American Group Psychotherapy Association.

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