

**The 40-Year History of the Association of VA Chief Psychologists (AVACP) and the  
Association of VA Psychologist Leaders (AVAPL): 1977–2017**

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**Overview**

This narrative separately chronicles each of the four decades of association history and describes significant organization events and activities in each decade in a mostly sequential manner. The key issues and concerns of the association reflect how the organization influenced and was influenced itself by what was happening in VA psychology over the last 40 years. The decision to closely follow in sequence what was reported in the association newsletters, especially the columns by association presidents, allows the reader to gain an appreciation of the thoughts and mood of leadership at the time events were unfolding. Author/historian information is presented in the Summary Comments to augment the significance of key contributions of the association to VA psychology.

Data sources for this history were selected primarily from highlights of the almost 2500 pages of 101 association newsletters since 1978. These highlights were only a small portion of the wealth of information about an active, member-driven association focused on professional and veteran health care activities over its 40-year history. More information can be obtained about the highlights and background of selected material by reviewing the detailed reports and minutes of association meetings printed in the newsletters. Those newsletters further cover patient care, veteran issues, and other material not selected for this history. In some cases, information not in the newsletters is supplemented by the history of VA psychology (Baker & Pickren, 2007) or other sources.

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### The Beginning

In 1977, an impromptu meeting of a group of VA chief psychologists during a national meeting of chiefs of psychology and psychiatry shared views about the many problems facing VA psychology. The focus of these discussions ranged from the selection and training of new chiefs and qualifications for chiefs to clinical privileging of psychologists and questions about the future of the VA psychology training program. That impromptu meeting also agreed that one way to deal with those many issues was to work together on the issues and form an association of VA chief psychologists. One of the leaders during the discussion was Oakley Ray, chief of psychology at the Nashville VA, who agreed to share their thoughts with other chief psychologists.

In May 1977, a letter was sent to all VA chief psychologists by Oakley Ray in which he outlined the discussion and recommendations of the group and included a questionnaire asking chiefs for their views on the importance of several problem areas the smaller group had raised. He also asked if chiefs were interested in being part of an organization of chiefs to work on these issues.

The results of the questionnaire indicated that 80% of chiefs would be interested in joining a chiefs organization. In addition to supporting the proposed goals in the training of new chiefs, qualifications of chiefs, clinical privileging, and the psychology training program, other items were added on the questionnaire that were also highly rated such as bonus pay for psychologists receiving a diplomate by the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP), medical staff membership for psychologists, and conversion of VA psychologists to recruitment and personnel policies in Title 38.

A meeting to discuss a proposed organization of what was initially called the Association of Psychology Chiefs in the VA was scheduled for August 27, 1977 at the APA annual meeting in San Francisco. At the end of the two-hour meeting, a steering committee was established with Oakley Ray as chair, and a group was formed to write by-laws and a constitution for the association. The work of that by-laws group was approved by chiefs in December 1977 naming the new organization the Association of VA Chief Psychologists (AVACP). Early 1978 elections were held with Oakley Ray elected president, Hal Dickman (Palo Alto VA) as president-elect, and Joe Schenkel (Albuquerque VA) as secretary-treasurer.

At the August 1977 APA organizational meeting, Phil Laughlin (psychology chief at the VA in Knoxville, IA) was also named interim editor for an association newsletter. He produced the first newsletter sent to the field in January 1978. He remained as newsletter editor until he became AVACP president in 1983.<sup>2</sup>

### The First Decade: 1978–1987

Although many important issues had been suggested by those forming the new association, converting psychologists to Title 38 recruitment authority and personnel policies quickly rose to prominence in the first year and decade of association history. As will be noted in describing the activities of the next three decades of AVACP and its renamed successor, the Association of VA Psychologist Leaders (AVAPL), Title 38 issues have occupied the attention of association leaders throughout its history including the present time.<sup>3</sup>

The emergence of Title 38 as an AVACP focus was in fact due to its promotion by the American Psychological Association (APA). APA tried to convince AVACP that converting VA psychologists from Title 5 recruitment authority and policies under the cumbersome Civil Service Commission to the more efficient Title 38 recruitment authority used by physicians, dentists, and nurses in the VA would benefit VA psychologists. Especially noted was that Title 38 policies provided a better way to handle many of the professional issues of concern by chiefs of psychology such as clinical privileging, medical staff membership, and bonus pay for those receiving the ABPP.

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<sup>2</sup> The information in this introduction was summarized from an article by Jonathan Cummings, association archivist, describing the founding of the association in August 1977. That article appeared in the Winter 1998 issue of the association newsletter to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the association. That newsletter and all other printed issues of the newsletter from 1978-2003 cited in this history were stored in the VA psychology archives at the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology (CCHP) at the University of Akron. In 2016, these newsletters were scanned and converted to digital form by the CCHP and the 76 early newsletters selected for citation in this history can be electronically retrieved by the newsletter's year and month, season, or edition name by its URL listed in a special reference section at the end of this article. All cited and non-cited newsletters can be found at <http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15960coll1> (select *Newsletters of the Association of VA Chief Psychologists & Association of VA Psychologist Leaders* from the listed subcollections.) A summary of each digital version of printed newsletters is also located on the AVAPL website at <http://www.avapl.org> in its newsletter section with direct links to the CCHP collection for online viewing and downloading of each newsletter.

<sup>3</sup> Title 38 recruitment and personnel policies for psychologists had actually been considered in 1946 when VA Central Office Chief Psychologist James Miller convinced Omar Bradley, the new administrator for the VA, to include psychologists along with physicians, dentists, and nurses in Title 38. Legislation would have been required for this addition, however, but was never submitted because of the pressures to staff and implement psychology and mental health treatment programs for the millions of veterans returning from World War II (Baker & Pickren, 2007).

Many chiefs of psychology became interested in Title 38 conversion as a way to by-pass the lengthy Civil Service Commission hiring procedures. It was tempting to consider the possibility of hiring staff as easily as selecting and appointing psychology interns under what was always Title 38 authority. Oakley Ray's first president's column in the new newsletter, however, expressed his reservations about Title 38 conversion and the pressure for that choice from APA (May 1978 newsletter). He believed that APA's Title 38 recommendation was motivated by their general interest in seeking parity for psychologists with psychiatrists, and he was not convinced that Title 38 conversion alone would be the panacea described by APA without addressing the organizational structures and regulations that restricted professional responsibility and privileges for psychologists. Ray ended his comments on Title 38 by saying he had specifically avoided other issues of personal interest to some such as ease of hiring and private practice which he considered ephemeral compared to the issue he raised.

In that same newsletter, VA Central Office (VACO) psychologists Charles Stenger and Cecil Peck offered the opinion in two articles that with two-thirds of the 1300 psychologists in the VA having some type of outside professional practice, conversion to Title 38 would allow them to retain their practices only if they went part time with some loss of flexibility and control. They additionally suggested the possibility that medical school psychologists and others would seek more influence over hiring psychologists in the VA, perhaps stressing training or research over patient care commitment in selecting staff.

The enthusiasm for Title 38 bogged down when staff psychologists discovered that they would not be able to maintain a private practice under Title 38. Many indicated they would testify against any legislation introduced in Congress that would propose VA psychologists be placed in Title 38 (July 1980 newsletter).

With opposition from staff psychologists, association leaders decided to give Title 38 a lower priority in order to attend to other identified priorities responsible for the founding of the association. Future AVACP presidents and presidential candidates, however, would keep the issue alive as a goal for AVACP (October 1981 and April 1982 newsletters).

By late 1978, AVACP had begun establishing a number of task groups addressing the main problem areas identified earlier. The first was the Task Force on the Selection and Training of Chief Psychologists. The association also needed to address legislation proposed in VACO in Washington, DC that would require a VA psychologist to be licensed in a state. One concern was

for the future of VA research psychologists paid from research funds but not necessarily clinically trained or eligible for licensure. The officers also made the decision to assess dues of \$5 from members to support the costs of the newsletter production and other association activities.

By the end of 1978, AVACP also began to attract negative attention due to its advocacy activities on behalf of the profession. A letter was sent to the VA administrator from the chairmen of departments of psychiatry (later identified as a resolution of the American Association of Chairmen of Departments of Psychiatry) suggesting that VA policy should be changed to give psychiatrists the “exclusive and executive authority” for patient care. Included in the October 1978 newsletter was the VA’s response to Senator Inouye from Hawaii who had written the VA administrator about the resolution sent to him. The response to the Senator’s letter indicated that VA policy would not be changed in this regard and encouraged the role of mental health councils in medical centers. The letter had been reviewed by psychology and psychiatry leaders in VACO mental health with suggestions, as requested by the administrator’s office. VACO psychiatry and psychology stood solidly together on this issue.

Early in 1979, concerns were raised about rumors that the VA’s psychology training budget might be cut by 10-25% for FY80. Also reported were beliefs that the Office of Personnel Management might define a supervisor in ways that might impact within-grade increases for GS-13 psychology chiefs (January 1979 newsletter). Worries about the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAH) standards affecting psychology’s membership on the medical staff prompted AVACP president Oakley Ray to write to JCAH asking for clarification of their policy on this matter. The JCAH response did not resolve the issue saying only that what was permitted or restricted for membership on the medical staff was largely determined by state licensing laws (August 1979 newsletter).

The rumored cuts in the training program surfaced, but in briefings with and assistance from APA, incoming AVACP president Harold Dickman testified at Senate hearings on the impact of the reductions in the VA’s proposed psychology training budget and was able to later report that the Senate directed the VA to restore \$900,000 of the cuts that the VA had proposed for the VA psychology training budget for FY80 (November 1979 newsletter). On another training matter, Dana Moore’s VACO psychology training column in that issue listed 27 VA psychology internships that were APA accredited or in APA accredited consortia.

The assistance given by APA in arranging for Dickman to testify at the Senate hearings was among the first official advocacy partnerships of AVACP and APA on VA psychology and patient care issues, a partnership that grew over the years and is strong today. The psychology training program cuts that stimulated this advocacy partnership were also some of first indications that budget issues would increasingly become a more critical factor affecting VA psychology operations and that of the VA and federal government in general.

In his president's column in the January 1980 newsletter, Dickman reported that legislation was signed into law in December 1979 requiring that new psychology hires in the VA be licensed in a state, have a doctoral degree in clinical or counseling psychology, and have an internship acceptable to the VA administrator. The latter was defined by subsequent administrators as an APA-accredited internship, a position never overturned by VA administrators from any future applicant.<sup>4</sup>

In 1980, AVACP continued their activities to develop a chiefs' training program and have psychologists included as voting members on the Clinical Executive Boards (CEBs) of VA medical centers. Senator Inouye again wrote a letter to the VA expressing an interest in having psychologists on the CEB. A response from the chief medical director appeared in the February 1981 newsletter in which he indicated that this was in fact a position already supported by the VA and that psychology was already represented on over half of the VA's CEBs.

In a decision to take the AVACP officers to Washington to meet and discuss psychology and veteran health care concerns with APA leaders and VACO officials, AVACP president Sidney Cleveland was able to report that successful meetings were held in the May 1981 newsletter and described in his column who they met with and issues discussed. He did refer to Washington, however, as "Gloom City" and pointed out to members the importance of justifying resources in the coming era of reduced budgets using the example of the VA psychology internship training program.

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<sup>4</sup> In a review of this manuscript, Bob Gresen (personal communication, March 5, 2017) noted that qualification standards published in 2016 for employment of psychologists in the VA spelled out the need for the doctoral degree to be awarded from a graduate program accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA), the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), or the Psychological Clinical Services Accreditation System (PCSAS) at the time the program was completed. CPA applicants with accreditation in school psychology would not be eligible for VA employment as a psychologist and must also have U.S. citizenship required of all applicants. Internships acceptable for employment must similarly be accredited by the APA or CPA at the time the program was completed. Provisions for respecialization training are included along with temporary psychologist appointments for up to two years without licensure.

Cleveland's decision to send AVACP officers to Washington to meet with APA leaders and especially with VACO officials established the first of what came to be called the mid-winter meeting of the association officers in Washington, a meeting that has been repeated annually by every succeeding association president. The face-to-face meetings and discussions of issues of importance to VA psychology represented a critical advocacy presence of the association in the minds of those with whom they met.<sup>5</sup>

Interest in Title 38 surfaced again in 1981 when Congress mandated a study of which professions should be converted to Title 38 because of recruitment, pay, and staff retention issues. Cleveland formed a task group to determine an AVACP position that could be supported by both chiefs and their staff if VA psychology were to be placed in Title 38 with the plan to send that statement to VACO and Congress to consider in its study (February 1981 newsletter). An administrative issues article in the same newsletter reported that a statement draft was prepared by the task group with an attempt to consolidate previous data and discussion regarding Title 38. The draft statement included support for Title 38 conversion if there were no restrictions on outside professional activities and income and was sent to all VA psychologists. With 901 votes received by chiefs and staff, 52% supported the statement without reservation, 27% indicated support with some reservation, and 20% did not support the statement.<sup>6</sup> With comments by those having reservation such as preferring a more forceful statement of contingency support for Title 38 as well as adding a position on leave status, the statement was revised to be more specific in its positions on support and added a phrase that salary and leave provisions should not be less than currently available to VA psychologists. The article also included the last paragraph of the revised statement summarizing the position with those changes.

With Title 38 back in the spotlight, however, a group of VA staff psychologists began renewing their Title 38 opposition with a plan to form a new organization called the National Organization of VA Psychologists (NOVA Psi) which surfaced in 1981 (August 1981 and

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<sup>5</sup> A little understood benefit in forming the association, following the example by VA chiefs of medicine and VA chiefs of surgery, not overlooked by Oakley Ray and other early psychology leaders, was that as an organization independent of the VA, its officers could negotiate directly with high level VACO leaders to meet with them and discuss professional and patient care issues. That option was not open to psychiatry and psychology leaders in VACO mental health who had to use the VA's chain of command to introduce mental health program concerns to top VACO officials (Baker & Pickren, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> VA psychology records indicated there were about 1500 psychologists in the VA in 1981.

October 1981 newsletters). NOVA Psi became an advocacy voice opposing Title 38 conversion for VA psychologists with the election of Leila Foster as its first president in 1982.

Jonathan Cummings' president's column in the April 1982 newsletter described the activities of the AVACP officers at the second successful mid-winter meeting of the association in Washington. He was unable, though, to describe progress on merit pay, JCAH standards, nor the fate of psychologists for converting to Title 38. That newsletter also included an update in Dana Moore's VACO psychology training column that there were now 72 VA psychology services with independent or consortia-based APA accreditation of their training programs.

The October 1982 newsletter included a report by incoming AVACP president Rodney Baker who indicated that VACO will likely give programmatic approval of a proposed association administrative training program for new chiefs of psychology—but with no funding. He added that AVACP will be looking at ways to fund a training program for 1983 and that AVACP also had plans to produce and distribute a *Handbook for Chiefs of Psychology* in 1983 that would be sent to all chiefs, new and established, with materials collected for chief's training. In the January 1983 newsletter, Baker reported in his president's column that VACO had given programmatic approval to the chief's training program without funding. The programmatic approval for chief's training, however, enabled new chiefs to request full or partial funding from their medical centers or use personal funds and administrative leave to attend. Baker also announced that the chief's training program would be started in April 1983 in Washington, DC. The October 1982 newsletter also contained an announcement that Congress had decided not to include psychologists in Title 38, and the issue lost momentum for a few years.

The July 1983 newsletter contained a report in the Lipservice news column of the first chief's training program in April with Rod Baker, Jonathan Cummings, Ken Klauck, and Orville Lips as chief of psychology faculty along with VACO observer/evaluators. The names of the 18 new chiefs attending the first administrative training program of new chiefs of psychology were included in the newsletter.

The promised *Handbook for VA Chief Psychologists* was prepared by a committee chaired by Sid Cleveland who had asked psychology chiefs to send him station policies that they had prepared on clinical privileges, performance standards, and peer review that were to become part of the content in the handbook along with other materials that had been collected for the chiefs



training program. The handbook was distributed to the field in the summer of 1983 (July 1983 newsletter).<sup>7</sup>

In his president's column for the April 1983 newsletter, Baker described the main topics discussed during the AVACP mid-winter meeting that focused on merit pay and bonuses for ABPP but was unable to report movement on either issue. Also on the officer's agenda was the retirement of Cecil Peck as deputy director of the VACO Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences Service and the association's hoped-for plans for an early replacement. The AVACP officers received assurances from the director of mental health, Jack Ewalt, and from the VA chief medical director, Donald Custis, that they were planning to replace Peck as soon as possible. In their meeting with Custis, he additionally requested that AVACP suggest names to him that the association would like to have included for consideration, a request promptly prepared and sent to him by the association. In that newsletter, Jack Davis and Hal Dickman also described Cecil Peck's accomplishments for mental health and psychology in his 36 years in the VA.

A new editorial staff for the association newsletter, headed by Thomas Miller, chief psychologist at the Lexington VA, gave the newsletter a new title/masthead, *The VA Chief Psychologist*, for the October 1983 newsletter. In his first president's column in that newsletter, Philip Laughlin identified seven initiatives for the following year that included the development of position papers on health psychology/neuropsychology and geropsychology, a study of AVACP's fiscal condition for developing future projects, and a continuation of involving members in AVACP task groups and activities. That newsletter also had an article by Edmund Nightingale with a progress report on the VA's two-year old resource allocation methodology (RAM) used to prepare medical center funding. He further described attempts to correct funding deficits in areas of long-term care, rehabilitation, and mental health services for patients with a psychiatric diagnosis. The following newsletter added information on diagnostic-related-groups (DRGs) by Rod Baker to help chiefs understand the process of converting medical chart information into DRG categories used in RAM budgeting (February 1984 newsletter).

The February 1984 newsletter announced the appointment of John (Jack) Davis to the position of deputy director of the Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences Service in VACO to

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<sup>7</sup> The usefulness of that handbook, noted by both chiefs and medical center directors, prompted AVACP to produce and distribute an updated *Association of VA Chief Psychologists Manual for VA Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs of Psychology* in 1993 of over 300 pages with most of the training materials used in the training program for chiefs and assistant chiefs at the time. Copies of both the 1983 and 1993 manuals are stored in the VA psychology archives at the CCHP.

replace Cecil Peck, an appointment applauded by the association. In the May 1984 newsletter, the president's column deferred comment on the recently held mid-winter meeting with a decision to include detailed minutes of the meetings by secretary-treasurer Kenneth Klauck. Laughlin's decision to print the minutes of the mid-winter meetings in the newsletter has been followed by most subsequent association presidents.

The May 1984 newsletter additionally announced that the second program for the administrative training of chiefs would be held in July at the North Central Regional Medical Education Center (RMEC) in Minneapolis. That move of the training program to the Minneapolis RMEC was the result of negotiations by Phil Laughlin, a member of the 1984 chief's training faculty. He was also able to negotiate room and meals at the Minneapolis RMEC facility at no cost to faculty and participants (P. R. Laughlin, personal communication, November 13, 2016). Participants, however, would still need their medical centers to provide transportation costs or use personal funds for that purpose with AVACP continuing to provide reimbursement for faculty travel expenses as they did for the first program in 1983.<sup>8</sup>

In 1985, an article by Dale Cannon in the newsletter announced that the first version of the Mental Health Package (MHP) with its computer-assisted assessment would be released in the winter (January 1985 newsletter). His announcement had to be changed several times over the next few years, however, when delays for obtaining permissions for using copyrighted assessments were being obtained for the MHP and a final decision made that VACO would be paying for assessment use for copyrighted computer-assisted assessments in VA facilities from a national budget.

FY85 also introduced the beginning of some dramatic, crisis-level events in the VA that directed much of AVACP's activity over the next few years. Orville Lips' president's column in the January 1985 newsletter alerted members to attempts to control expenses in federal government with rumored pay cuts, reductions in GS 11-15 management numbers, general reductions in federal employment, and reductions in veterans' eligibility for care with required co-payments for some veterans for their health care. These rumors soon became a reality and demanded the association's attention.

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<sup>8</sup> The Minneapolis RMEC staff was impressed with the evaluation data of the training program held at their facility in 1984 and hosted the program for another 13 years providing room and meals for participants and faculty. The Minneapolis RMEC additionally helped the program grow with excellent logistical support and training resources until the program moved to the St. Louis Center of the VA Employee Education System in 1998 and to the VA Learning University at North Little Rock, AR in 1999.

In the May 1985 newsletter, Lips reported on the mid-winter meeting of the association officers in Washington that added visits with representatives from veterans' service organizations (VSOs) to the AVACP agenda along with its meetings with VACO and APA officials. An important concern raised in all meetings was the proposed reductions in number of GS 11-15 grades recommended for the VA and other federal programs by the Grace Commission seeking to reduce managerial jobs in federal government to control spending (October 1984 newsletter.) Since Title 38 positions were excluded by the VA from the proposed Grace Commission management cuts, some VA chiefs of psychology believed that AVACP should revisit the issue of conversion to Title 38. Lips also reported a serious problem was emerging with psychology's representation in VACO mental health. Joseph Mancusi's role in representing psychology in VACO would be lost with his decision to leave the VA, and plans to replace him were unsettled with the announcement that 150 VACO staff reductions had been proposed. The concern with lack of representation of psychology in VACO mental health was further exacerbated in the August 1985 president's column when Lips announced that Jack Davis, the one remaining psychologist in VACO as deputy director of the mental health service, was retiring with no plans to fill his position. That meant that there would soon be no psychology position filled on a permanent basis in VACO mental health.<sup>9</sup>

Rod Baker also added an article to the August 1985 newsletter that helped chiefs understand the worrisome issue of what VACO called staffing guideline data being introduced in VACO reports. The data being used had little to do with guidelines and more appropriately were indications of productivity. He provided chiefs with a worksheet for calculating their actual vs earned FTEE based on the data chiefs were providing on their Automated Management Information Service (AMIS) reports that were being reviewed in VACO.

With all the changes occurring and on the horizon, Tom Patterson's president's column in the February 1986 newsletter noted that he was preparing a survey to send chiefs to help guide AVACP priorities. He also indicated he would be asking chiefs their opinion about the newly raised topic of whether AVACP should seek to have separate services in VACO for psychiatry and psychology or remain in the combined psychology/psychiatry mental health service. In the May 1986 issue describing the mid-winter meeting in Washington, Patterson reported that the

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<sup>9</sup> There were a number of times over the next 12 years when there were no permanently appointed psychologists in VACO mental health. Psychology chiefs at medical centers in the Washington, DC area temporarily served as acting deputy directors whenever problems and delays in recruitment occurred.

AVACP officers had now added visits with Congressional members and staffers for the Veterans Affairs Committees to their agenda. He summed up their mid-winter visits by saying that change and reductions seemed more likely in the future.

In his last president's column in the August 1986 newsletter, Patterson congratulated William Klett for his selection as newsletter editor, but was unable to report any progress on appointing a new deputy for VACO mental health. The newsletter also included a report on the 1986 chief's training program that had introduced an overlapping training agenda to provide follow-up training for participants who had attended the program two years ago. Program evaluation data indicated that combining newly appointed chiefs with those chiefs receiving follow-up training enhanced the training experience for both groups, and a decision had been made to continue this follow-up eligibility feature in future programs.

FY86 ended with incoming AVACP president, Thomas Miller, reporting on AVACP activities at the APA annual meeting (October 1986 newsletter). He indicated that a meeting of the VA Psychology Coordinating Committee (representatives of AVACP, the VA Section of Division 18, and NOVA Psi) had been able to reach agreement on all issues discussed, including an acceptable proposal for Title 38 conversion for psychologists that allowed some exceptions for private practice. The agreed-upon proposal by the Coordinating Committee would allow current staff to choose between remaining in Title 5 with private practice permitted or electing Title 38 conversion with possible pay and promotion benefits but no private practice—new hires would be placed in Title 38. The president's column, however, also added that AVACP contacts with Congressional members indicated a dismal outlook to broaden Title 38 to include a private practice provision. The newsletter issue also included an article by Ed Nightingale alerting members to the impact on DRGs with alternative management strategies being considered by VACO. Another entry in that newsletter was a copy of a letter from Rod Baker in his role as the chair of the Field Advisory Task Group for the VACO Psychology Staffing Guideline Project which he sent to the VACO mental health director. The letter summarized changes in staffing guideline data formulae that showed psychology productivity in earned FTEE exceeded by as much as 15% that of actual FTEE.

A final item in Miller's president's column for the October 1986 newsletter was his announcement that VACO had decided not to provide a bonus for VA psychologists who received a diplomate from ABPP. A VA general counsel memorandum dated July 18, 1986 sent

to the chief medical director indicated the recent legislation only “permitted” the VA to pay bonuses for psychologists receiving the ABPP and that the bonus for receiving the ABPP should only be used to help resolve problems in recruitment and retention. General counsel had concluded that data reviewed by their office did not indicate that VA psychologists had noteworthy difficulties with recruitment or retention and therefore special bonus pay for boarded psychologists should not be approved.<sup>10</sup>

The last year of the first decade included an AVACP decision not to pursue separate services in VACO for psychology and psychiatry until a deputy director for mental health was appointed, a position traditionally held by a psychologist (May 1987 newsletter). In Kenneth Bloom’s first president’s column in the November 1987 newsletter, he was able to announce that Edward Sieracki, chief of psychology at the VA medical center in Coatesville, PA, had been selected as the new deputy director of the Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences Service in VACO. That newsletter also featured a report of staffing losses in VA psychology services from October 1984 to March 1987 with an overall loss of eight percent of doctoral psychologists but with 38% of psychology services reporting no psychologist losses. The data did suggest that large psychology services who were DRG/RAM losers (generally indicating expenses exceeded funding) experienced the largest staff reductions, more so in the northwest and midwest. The number of downgraded chief grades was small but several GM-15 chief positions were downgraded to GM-14 grades when the incumbent either resigned or retired. The report indicated that the nursing service lost more staff percentage-wise than psychology, and that psychiatry lost fewer staff than psychology but more than most other physician services.

### The Second Decade: 1988–1997

The second decade began with a mix of signs for improvement for VA psychology and mental health. Bloom’s next president’s message in the February 1988 newsletter presented plans for the AVACP mid-winter meeting with a lead issue for visits to VACO and APA officials including AVACP’s continued quest for incentive pay for the ABPP. With AVACP

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<sup>10</sup> At the mid-winter meeting in January, the officers decided to pursue mandated bonuses for receiving the ABPP and, with the support of the VA Psychology Coordinating Committee, the APA Office of Legislative affairs agreed to recommend mandated bonuses to the Legislature. The recent VACO decision not to provide an ABPP bonus to VA psychologists under permissive legislation was discussed. The officers agreed that the VACO reply was very comprehensive and well-documented and argued effectively that although there was a loss of senior psychologists, some are replaced by other senior psychologists.

considering expanding membership to psychology assistant chiefs, the newsletter reported that a letter had been prepared by Ed Nightingale as association secretary/treasurer and sent to assistant chiefs who were questioning the purpose of AVACP. The current by-laws and constitution of AVACP were also included in this issue. The August 1988 newsletter reported that psychology assistant chiefs were now eligible for AVACP membership under approved membership changes.

With escalating costs of mailing and printing the AVACP newsletter, a survey was included in the May 1988 newsletter asking members their views regarding continuation of the newsletter as well as options to reduce publication costs. In a news and notes column, Georgette Bellucci included a request from Ed Sieracki, deputy director of VACO mental health, asking for input on several projects he was working on that included plans for a national meeting of chiefs of psychology and psychiatry (who had not met for a number of years), an initiative discussed with the chief of the medicine service in VACO to increase psychology involvement in preventive health (hypertension, obesity, and smoking cessation), and discussions with the VACO Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) suggesting that psychology postdoctoral fellowships be pursued in behavioral medicine, AIDS, gerontology and neuropsychology.

Kenneth Klauck's first president's column for the November 1988 newsletter began on a light note when he thanked Bloom for the excellent tradition he began by awarding Klauck the "Chief of Chiefs" sweatshirt which he looked forward to passing on to president-elect Georgette Bellucci next year<sup>11</sup>. The president's column also included an announcement that VACO will be requesting proposals for new treatment proposals for PTSD along with the development of a national PTSD center. He added that with Dana Moore's transfer to head the Leadership VA program, that OAA had selected Dorothy Stringfellow (later Gloria Holland then Linda Johnson)

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<sup>11</sup> The sweatshirt with the "Chief of Chiefs" title on the front was given to Ken Bloom by his staff on becoming president of AVACP. He considered it a symbol of office and decided to give it to Ken Klauck who had to put it on before starting his presidential year and making any first remarks as president at the end of the 1988 APA meeting. Since Bloom was arguably the largest association president ever to wear the sweatshirt and with Bellucci the smallest, Bellucci made the comment in her president's column (January 1990 newsletter) that it was more a dress for her than a sweatshirt with its 4XL size. Subsequently worn by every association president since then in making first comments as president, past presidents added their name to the sweatshirt over time. In passing the sweatshirt to Matthew Blusewicz at the 1998 APA meeting, Bob Gresen referred to the sweatshirt as coming as close to a "robe of authority" that the association had and noted that the sweatshirt was now emblazoned on the back with "Leader of Leaders" depicting the association's new role and vision. Numerous iconic and humorous references to the sweatshirt surfaced from time to time in the newsletters and minutes of the association.

to oversee the many non-physician VA training programs that included the psychology internship program.<sup>12</sup>

Klauck additionally noted that discussions had begun to develop psychology postdoctoral training and to review the psychology internship stipend now at \$10,000 per year. The newsletter additionally announced that the AMIS workload report completed by psychology and other services would be suspended for one-year for psychology while staffing guideline data was integrated into their report, that new Mental Illness Research and Education Centers (MIRECCs) would have funding for additional psychology internships in those centers, and that the VA was expected to be elevated to federal department status with a secretary as its head who would sit on the president's cabinet.

The 1989 newsletters continued with a mix of good and not so good news. Klauck's president's column in the January 1989 newsletter announced that case management and incentive therapy programs in VACO would be transferred from the Rehabilitation Medicine Service to the Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences Service and would be integrated with compensated work therapy and counseling psychology. The newsletter also reported that the officers had received and approved the results of an ad hoc committee report examining the results of the newsletter survey. On that survey, members supported continuation of the newsletter, and the committee had recommended searching for a medical center compensated work therapy program willing to take on the task of printing the newsletter.

Klauck's president's column in the May 1989 newsletter reported that the psychology internship stipend had been unexpectedly raised to \$13,000 over a three-year period, but that those increases would be funded from cuts in the number of funded internships and by withdrawing all funding from the summer training program. The training cuts were given attention in most meetings with VACO and APA officials in the recently held AVACP mid-winter meeting of officers with planning to restore those cuts. Klauck also noted that the agenda for the mid-winter meeting included an appointment with VA Secretary Edward Derwinski, newly confirmed as the first VA head to receive that title with cabinet status. It was the first time a head of the VA had met with the AVACP officers. AVACP also found out at the mid-winter

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<sup>12</sup> Although Stringfellow was a dietitian, Holland a Ph.D. in education with a VA background in Health Services Research and Development, and Johnson a nurse, all three of them established excellent working relationships on psychology training issues with VACO mental health staff and the Psychology Training Advisory Committee and often spoke at psychology meetings at APA and met with the AVACP officers during the mid-winter meetings.

meetings that VACO would be fully funding faculty travel for the 1989 chief's training program, an expense previously funded by AVACP for the past six years. In his VACO mental health report in this newsletter, Ed Sieracki described some successes in upgrading chief psychologist positions from GM-14 to 15 and GM-13 to 14, the first chief position upgrades in three years.

The January 1990 newsletter added the new Department of Veterans Affairs logo to its masthead, but Georgette Bellucci's first president's column had to describe to members a reduced status of VA operations under a continuing resolution that sequestered budget cuts of 36% of last year's funding until a final budget was approved. Any plans for new programs in the new fiscal year would have to be placed on hold. Ed Sieracki's VACO mental health report noted that an increase in training stipends was being sought and of successes obtaining special pay for psychologists in VA facilities having difficulty recruiting for vacancies, especially in high-cost living areas. He added that a task force chaired by Robert Kerns had begun work on developing a Program Guide for Health Psychology and that VACO continued to have successes in upgrading chief positions.

In her next president's column (April 1990 newsletter), Georgette Bellucci was able to report that with an approved VA budget, an increase for psychology internship stipends was approved in the amount of \$13,700 (based on a \$12,700 average internship stipend in the country with \$1,000 added for use by interns to acquire health insurance.) She also indicated that funding for the psychology summer trainee program would be restored. She additionally reported that VACO mental health had been successful in securing funding for program initiatives in substance abuse, HCMI domiciliaries, and CWT/TR demonstration projects and that funding had been allocated for 20 more PTSD Clinical Treatment Team programs.

With psychology recruitment and retention problems remaining an issue, both Bellucci and Sieracki used their April 1990 newsletter columns to report consideration being given to including psychologists under a hybrid Title 38 recruitment and personnel program used by pharmacists in the VA. Hybrid Title 38 permitted the use of Title 38 for recruitment and staff appointments, pay determination, and promotions but used Title 5 features for leave and grievances and, especially, would allow staff psychologists to maintain a private practice.

With interest stirring in hybrid Title 38, a proposal from VACO mental health was sent to the VA's Policy Advisory Board to recommend legislation converting psychologists to hybrid Title 38 (April 1990 newsletter). That recommendation was turned down by the Board along with a



similar request by VACO Dietetics Service (June 1990 newsletter). Apparently many services, including the VACO Social Work Service, were becoming interested in hybrid Title 38. Instead of submitting individual legislative requests to Congress, the Board decided to seek legislation that would give the Board authority to decide who would be placed in hybrid Title 38. That again slowed progress for a while on that issue. Congress later decided not to give the Board that authority.

The members of the VA Coordinating Committee (AVACP, the VA Section of Division 18, and NOVA Psi) saw promise in hybrid Title 38 and each organization carefully began talking about it with their members to generate interest. In the July 1992 newsletter, the AVACP president was able to announce the agreement of the Coordinating Committee to seek hybrid Title 38 status for VA psychologists, and a full report on the pros and cons of Title 5 and hybrid Title 38 used in their agreement was published in the January 1993 newsletter.

It was also at this time that APA decided to renew its support for and conviction that regular Title 38 was still the best option for VA psychologists, even without a private practice provision. Government relations staff in the APA Practice Directorate made that argument in a seven page memorandum published in the June 1993 newsletter. AVACP leaders decided to continue to seek conversion to hybrid Title 38, however, a position that had been supported by its members.

The June 1993 newsletter also reported that Senator Inouye had introduced a bill in the Senate to place psychologists in hybrid Title 38 that was awaiting a response from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and VACO to determine its viability. The December 1993 newsletter reported that OMB was not in support of the bill which effectively terminated movement on hybrid Title 38 for psychologists at the time. As the AVACP turned to more pressing issues in the remainder of its second decade, the hybrid Title 38 effort and its provisions for recruitment and staff appointments, pay determination, and promotions was not officially renewed until the third decade of the organization's history but was never lost in the minds of many of its leaders and members.

Returning to 1990, Georgette Bellucci's president's column summarized the AVACP mid-winter meeting and added that Dale Cannon would be sending out a survey on recruitment and retention of psychologists to determine how psychology services were faring under the VA's efforts to reduce overall staff (June 1990 newsletter). In her October 1990 newsletter column, she reported that the survey showed an 11.2% vacancy in psychology positions and that one-third of

new hires were leaving after five years. Non-competitive salary rates were considered a significant contributor to this data with published information that estimated GS 11-15 salaries in the VA were as much as 39% lower than comparable private sector positions. AVACP past president Ken Klauck's candidacy for APA president was additionally noted in this issue.

In his first president's column in the January 1991 newsletter, Dale Cannon offered the opinion that hybrid Title 38 was the best option for VA psychology in dealing with the recruitment and retention data noted in the recent survey. He also noted the pending retirement of Ed Sieracki, deputy director of VACO mental health. In his VACO mental health column in this newsletter, Sieracki described passage of the Federal Employees Comparability Pay Act which gave pay increases for those in high cost living areas above the increases received by others. He also presented a description of other locality pay increases for federal employees to begin in 1994.

In his president's column for the April 1991 newsletter, Cannon noted that the mid-winter meeting had featured the inclusion of psychologists on medical staff in many of their visits. The AVACP officers used letters received by the VA and the now named Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) in their meetings with APA and VACO officials indicating that such membership was permitted. He also had these letters printed in the newsletter. The president's column added that the officers shared with the director of mental health the message that most psychologists preferred to remain in the joint psychiatry/psychology mental health service rather than seek a separate service for psychology. The new newsletter editor, Barry Kinney, requested and published Ken Klauck's biography and APA president's platform in this issue. As the first VA psychology leader chosen to be on the APA president-elect ballot, however, Klauck did not win that election.

Edmund Nightingale's first president's column focused on the need for changes in reimbursement for mental health services in the VA's version of prospective reimbursement being used to decide medical center budgets (February 1992 newsletter). That newsletter also featured remarks by Martha Rae Barnes who had been selected to replace Sieracki as the new deputy director for VACO mental health. She noted a revision had been made to the VACO 1965 Psychology Manual and that a program guide for neuropsychology had been finalized and would soon be in the field. Nightingale also congratulated Robert Kerns on his special election to fill the office of president-elect vacated by Martha Rae Barnes' selection as deputy director.

For his president's column in the July 1992 newsletter, Nightingale was able to report that the goal of VA psychology leaders to establish postdoctoral training in the VA had been reached. Six postdoctoral fellowships in geropsychology had been funded for the next training year. Psychology training programs had already received information on procedures to follow in applying for one of these first regular postdoctoral training positions in psychology.<sup>13</sup>

The president's column in the January 1993 newsletter by Nightingale noted some progress on a number of issues such as clinical privileging and medical staff membership, a national chief's meeting, and recruitment and retention. He also directed members to Bob Gresen's previously mentioned comparison of Title 5 and hybrid Title 38. A report by Rod Baker described a decade of chief's training and changes, and the minutes of the AVACP business meeting and officers' meeting at the last APA meeting were included in the issue.

Robert Kerns' first president's column noted that it was apparent to him that AVACP was at an important crossroad with regard to its goals, leadership, structure, and even its viability as a relevant organization (June 1993 newsletter). He reported that he had asked Alexander Boeringa in his president-elect role to chair a task force to propose a response to these concerns and added that suggestions already made would be presented at this year's APA meeting for broader consideration.<sup>14</sup>

Kerns added some comments in his column on the success of the mid-winter meeting with the minutes included in this issue. As previously reported, the APA report recommending full Title 38 over hybrid Title 38 was included in this issue.

Alexander Boeringa's president's column in the October 1993 newsletter raised the concern of needing to find a way to monitor and report fast moving events and his decision to use the AVACP regional representatives in a more active role in re-establishing the telephone cascade system to call chiefs in their region on important matters. A December 1993 newsletter article by Martha Rae Barnes, deputy director of VACO mental health, alerted chiefs that more flexibility and authority was being given to local medical center directors to re-organize their medical centers. She included mention of a movement to contract out patient care services that were

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<sup>13</sup> The first VA-funded postdoctoral psychology training positions were established in substance abuse as part of an interprofessional clinical team training fellowship program beginning in October 1991. Dallas and Seattle each received one postdoctoral training position (Baker & Pickren, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Boeringa had been chosen as president-elect to replace Richard Blumberg who had been previously elected as president-elect but who retired before assuming that office.

previously provided by medical center staff. Her next mental health column noted that the proposed downsizing of psychology service staff by up to 50% by contracting out psychology services will have died a well-deserved death (March 1994 newsletter).

Bob Gresen's VACO mental health column as acting deputy later affirmed that what was called the Farsetta Report recommending a drastic contracting-out cut in psychology service staff no longer had that target (June 1994 newsletter). He thanked Ed Nightingale and Rod Baker for their white paper (included in the issue) that had a brief overview of psychology's history and contributions to the VA as well as cost data that showed that psychological services would be much more costly if contracted out rather than provided by in-house psychology service staff. In his president's column, Boeringa also noted that if only a small number of the changes talked about in the VA ever occurred that the VA would be radically different in the next few years with old structures swept away. He suggested that the best defense for psychology was not to get bogged down in protecting turf but continue doing what we in psychology do best by serving veterans.

Christine LaGana's president's column in the September 1994 newsletter noted that efforts to re-invent government and health care reform had resulted in many losses for psychology. She added that there were at least five facilities exploring subjugation of psychology services under psychiatry, a position adamantly opposed by VACO mental health. Her December 1994 president's column reported that a telephone cascade survey indicated that there were 17 vacant psychology chief positions with only three advertised for recruitment. She also noted that the new VA Under Secretary for Health Kenneth Kizer had appointed a committee to address the issue of medical center directors being able to make merger and other decisions without VACO interference.

LaGana's April 1995 newsletter column commented on Dr. Kizer's plan for reorganizing the VA which would provide significant decentralization of power to 22 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs). She later noted in commenting on the mid-winter meeting that all reports were that Kizer had assumed full control of the VA's health care reform. In the meeting of officers with Kizer, LaGana reported that he was aware of the healthcare contributions of psychology in the VA and was supportive of psychology's mission. She had to add, however, that together with the Deal Report delegating authority to medical center directors to re-organize their medical centers as they chose, reports of some re-organization plans had already negatively

and significantly impacted psychology. She urged psychology to develop support systems in the VISNs and within the medical center and look into developing mental health councils or VISN chiefs of psychology networks.

The opposition of VACO mental health to any reorganization plans that affected the autonomy of psychology to pursue its service delivery was noted in an article in the April 1995 newsletter by Tom Horvath, the psychiatrist director of VACO mental health. His comments were welcomed by psychology leaders but, with the aforementioned Deal Report permitting medical center directors to re-organize without interference from VACO, directors felt free to ignore any VACO discipline leaders commenting on their reorganization plans—and did so. Prior to 1995, virtually all medical centers employing psychologists had an independent service headed by a chief of psychology. Between 1995 and 2001, that number had dropped from 150 to 30 (Baker & Pickren, 2007).

The newsletter also included an 18-page report of people met, topics discussed, and responses received during the AVACP mid-winter meetings with APA and VACO officials and with VSO and Congressional staff. LaGana's president's column in the June 1995 newsletter noted that another telephone cascade to chiefs was in progress with only a few horror stories of merger of psychiatry and psychology services resulting in loss of a chief psychologist position. She noted that most psychology leaders were using their creativity and expertise to improve continuity of services to veterans and maintain the autonomy of psychology in their medical centers.

In the October 1995 newsletter, incoming AVACP president Patrick Boudewyns wrote that his VA (Augusta) was among the first to be approved for a major reorganization. He noted that original plans called for combining psychiatry and psychology. In the end, however, they were successful in maintaining autonomy for the psychology service. He shared three lessons that he had learned from his medical center reorganization activities: begin by taking the offense, get some feedback from the front lines, and form alliances to get consensus from all stakeholders. He commented briefly on each lesson. In the visionaries' views column, Randy Taylor explored his own views of psychological practice and shared two other articles, one entitled "Survival Behaviors for VA Psychology" by Rod Baker and another entitled "Psychology as an Independent Service" by Rod Baker, Mark Cohen, and Bob Gresen. With a faculty decision to have a participant from the chief's training program prepare a report on training, Robert Phares'

report on the successful 1995 chief's training program he attended appeared in this issue as did the minutes of the AVACP meetings at APA.

The July 1996 president's column by Boudewyns noted that the new service or product line management philosophy is clearly in the future for many psychology services. He added that in VACO, now named VA Headquarters (VAHQ), that the Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences Service had been renamed the Mental Health Strategic Healthcare Group, one of 10 strategic healthcare groups in VAHQ. It was his view that AVACP needed to change its name and add membership categories in a major by-laws overhaul.

Stephen Cavicchia's incoming president's column for the October 1996 newsletter noted a strong consensus from AVACP members at the recent APA annual meeting to move forward in broadening membership categories to include psychologists assuming leadership and management in roles other than as chief or assistant chief of psychology. He additionally noted that a task force had been appointed to draft new by-laws to that effect. That newsletter also reported that suggestions had been made to merge AVACP and NOVA Psi. A detailed report of the minutes of the meeting of AVACP officers and the minutes of the AVACP business meeting of members at APA were also published in this newsletter.

No newsletters were published for eight months while AVACP members considered and eventually approved a by-laws change re-naming the organization the Association of VA Psychologist Leaders (AVAPL) in February 1997. The AVACP officers did, however, schedule its mid-winter meeting in Washington, DC in March 1997 during the period with no newsletters (the mid-winter meeting minutes appeared in the June 1997 newsletter). Of note during their meetings was an AVACP officer discussion of a survey of psychology services in which Cavicchia received only 92 responses from 160 psychology services with no response from five VISNs and minimal responses from three VISNs despite repeated attempts to obtain the crucial data. He described survey results that indicated that since January 1995, 40 psychology services collectively reported staff cuts of 86 doctoral FTEE, ten reported collective losses of 16 FTEE, and 40 reported no losses. Also examined was a separate NOVA Psi survey from 239 of its 320 members in which 81% noted a worsening of morale among psychology staff with reorganizations affecting the practice of psychology at all but a few stations. Rod Baker's written report from the faculty of the training program for chiefs was also reviewed at that mid-winter meeting with approval of faculty recommendations to change the name of the program to

Training Leaders for Behavioral and Mental Health Programs and to add one day to the training agenda.

The June 1997 newsletter carried the new association name, and Cavicchia noted in his president's column in this issue that AVAPL would be focusing on the goal of filling the old position of deputy director for mental health now referred to as the deputy chief consultant for mental health in VA Headquarters, the only traditionally designated psychology position left in VAHQ mental health. An additional minor change in the newly adopted February 1997 AVAPL by-laws was approved by the members in August 1997 in an effort to better define the new psychology leadership roles that psychologists provided in medical centers. The association began planning to move quickly to offer membership to those now eligible. Noted previously, the minutes of the activities of the association at the mid-winter meetings in March were published in this newsletter.

With product lines emerging and staff reductions and loss of chief of psychology positions becoming common, Russell Lemle at the San Francisco VA saw the need for psychology to become more proactive in dealing with these issues and their future and was determined to find a way to bring psychology leaders together across the country to create a new vision for the future of VA psychology. In 1997, Lemle contacted Christine LaGana, a former president of the previous chief's association and now acting deputy director of VAHQ mental health, who agreed with his assessment and goals. LaGana suggested that they meet with incoming AVAPL president Bob Gresen during the APA convention in Chicago. That meeting recommended a first step was to seek the partnership of Randy Phelps in the APA practice directorate. Phelps readily agreed, and they began discussing what eventually became planning for a VA psychology leadership conference to be jointly sponsored by both AVACP and APA.<sup>15</sup>

The last newsletter of this decade of association history was printed in November 1997. Incoming AVAPL president Robert Gresen introduced a number of issues in the president's column for his year as president ranging from continued efforts to fill the deputy chief consultant position to efforts to reach out to new psychology leaders now eligible for membership in AVAPL. He also announced that AVAPL had decided to support long-time VA psychology

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<sup>15</sup> The need and planning for a VA psychology leadership conference is referred to briefly in Baker & Pickren (2007), but no mention of this planning was made until the November 1997 newsletter that announced the first conference would be held. The above information on the planning for this conference as well as a more detailed account of planning activities can be found in Russell Lemle's VA career story in the recently published *Even more stories from VA psychology* (Lemle, 2017).

supporter Patrick DeLeon for president of APA. He ended his column noting that the issue of prescription privileges had been an important topic of discussion both inside and outside the VA and wondered whether the association should stop ignoring the topic to at least beginning a dialogue among members. Added to this issue were the revised August 1997 bylaws and constitution of AVAPL.

A participant report by Peggy Cantrell in the November 1997 newsletter who had attended the June 1996 administrative chief's training program for VA chiefs, assistant chiefs, and psychology program managers noted that the 1996 chief's training program included six non-chief program managers to evaluate whether the program might be successfully broadened to psychology leaders outside of traditional service lines. The training was considered to provide an extraordinary training experience by all participants with six participants adding paragraphs to the report describing their unique experiences. It had already been reported elsewhere in this newsletter that 12 psychology program managers were included in the 1997 chief's training program with all reporting a similar positive training experience.

Finally included at the beginning of the November 1997 newsletter was an article written by Russell Lemle describing the planning and agenda and his support for a meeting of VA psychology leaders to be held January 23-24, 1998 in Dallas. A letter of invitation to attend the conference and become proactive in shaping the future of psychology in the VA was included in the newsletter and was jointly signed by Russ Newman of the APA Practice Directorate and Bob Gresen as president of AVAPL.

### The Third Decade: 1998–2007<sup>16</sup>

The April 1998 newsletter that started this decade had a report in the president's column by Gresen that the deputy chief consultant position for the Mental Health Strategic Healthcare

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<sup>16</sup> Readers will note a shift in focus with fewer newsletter details beginning the last half of this decade when a number of problems interfered with the production of the electronic newsletter and its storage on the AVAPL website resulted in no newsletters. From 2004 to 2009, only one electronic version of the newsletter was published and stored on the AVACP website, that of the 2006 APA Edition. From 2010 through 2012, four issues were published for website storage, and no issues were produced in 2013 or 2014. The missing data for those periods of AVAPL history are primarily taken from other sources as well as personal communication from past presidents of AVAPL. From 2015 to the present two issues were being produced annually and published on the website. Beginning in 2011 with a change of emphasis in newsletter content, minutes of the AVAPL business meetings at APA and the minutes of the officers' mid-winter meetings were now published separately on the website. The most recent minutes are listed on the homepage at <http://www.avapl.org> with older copies moved to the archives at <http://www.avapl.org/archives.html>



Group had been filled by Mary Jansen, who was the first psychologist leader in VACO mental health who had not come from the VA psychology ranks.<sup>17</sup> Gresen took the opportunity to thank Christine LaGana for serving as acting deputy for mental health in VACO for most of the last three-and-a-half years. He added that AVAPL sent the previous newsletter and this issue to all identified psychology leaders that included information about the organization as well as membership materials and encouraged them to join AVAPL as well as urging them to get involved.

Gresen's column for the April 1998 newsletter also noted that the psychology leadership conference held in Dallas in January was a resounding success with 90 psychologist leaders in attendance. He especially encouraged members to read the article in the newsletter on conference activities by Russell Lemle who originally proposed the idea of the conference and added that a planning committee was already at work planning a second conference. His column also noted that the importance and extent of APA's financial support and commitment was impressive and especially thanked Russ Newman of the APA Practice Directorate for his keynote address as well as the keynote address of Norm Abeles, APA past president, entitled "APA and VA Psychology: A Critical Partnership." Gresen's president's column added information about the activities of the AVACP officers at the March mid-winter meeting in Washington noting the warm greeting and support received for VA psychology from APA and VAHQ officials. He directed members to the minutes of the mid-winter meeting published in the newsletter for their review.

The April 1998 newsletter also included an article by Mary Jansen who introduced herself to members in her new deputy director role of VACO mental health. Christine LaGana and VAHQ chief consultant for mental health Tom Horvath added another article with comments on the status of and opportunities for psychology in the VA with all the organizational changes. Also provided in the newsletter was an article that updated losses by psychology and other mental health staff from FY95 through FY97 that indicated doctoral psychology losses numbering 145 positions. A description of the program and objectives of the July 1998 "chiefs" training program, now called Training Leaders for Behavioral and Mental Health Programs, were also

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<sup>17</sup> Her appointment came at a time of hiring leaders for VAHQ from outside the VA to provide new perspectives on the functioning of its health care system as the VA proceeded with health care reform and organizational changes.

included in this first newsletter of the third decade which additionally featured photos from the leadership conference and mid-winter meeting.

Russell Lemle's report on the leadership conference in the April 1998 newsletter re-stated the goals of the conference as well as described presentations and panel discussions held on the first day for 90 psychologist leaders from medical centers and VAHQ. He noted that the second day focused on brain-storming ideas and developing action plans to promote psychologists as leaders and as value-added providers in the new VA. He included mention of seven task groups established during the conference to continue the development of the most promising ideas. These included work groups on pursuing management credentials suggested by Kizer for top management officials, specific competencies that psychology leaders needed, and promotion and advancement training opportunities for psychologists interested in seeking management careers. Lemle's report additionally noted that, in addition to himself, the steering committee planning the first conference included AVAPL president Bob Gresen and Randy Phelps from the APA Practice Directorate.

The successes and activities of the first leadership conference deserve a special comment in this history of the association in beginning its third decade. Universal reports described the low morale of participants coming to the first conference. But by the end of day two, cautious optimism emerged as participants became involved in the opportunity to explore ideas of how they could be proactive in solving the problems they were experiencing. The discussions and beginning work of seven task groups formed on day two are arguably described in this history as the most critical point of the conference. These task groups gave participants the opportunity to focus their energy and resourcefulness on solutions rather than problems. Two of these task groups submitted extensive reports of discussions and ideas begun at and after the conference that were published in the next newsletter as were the reports of other task groups in succeeding newsletters.

The September 1998 newsletter began with repeated information about past association activities and accomplishments addressing those VA psychologists in new leadership positions who were now eligible for membership in AVAPL. The added membership application form contained specific reference taken from the association by-laws defining those eligible for membership. Incoming AVAPL president Matthew Blusewicz used his first column to thank previous association members for "hanging in there" through difficult times and welcomed new

members who joined with the re-defined membership categories. He additionally noted that the new psychology leader members now made up half of the current membership of AVAPL. He also announced in his column that the chief consultant for VAHQ mental health, Tom Horvath, had decided to return to the field as the chief of staff at the Houston VA and that recruitment would soon be underway for his replacement. Of significance, other than VAHQ was losing a valued colleague who supported VA psychology and was a strong voice for mental health care for veterans, was the fact that Horvath stressed that his position will be open for both psychiatrist and psychologist applicants. Blusewicz suggested that it was very important that there be enthusiastic competition for the vacancy.

Bob Gresen also reported in the September 1998 newsletter that Mary Jansen had received an offer she could not refuse and had already left VA Headquarters for a two-year position at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. The VAHQ plan was to recruit someone to fill that position for two years until she returned from her leave of absence. Gresen would serve as acting deputy pending an official appointment for the position. The newsletter also included an update by Ed Nightingale on the Veterans' Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) methodology now being used to determine medical center funding based on patient needs rather than practice patterns. The newsletter also included a letter from Kenneth Kizer as under secretary of health responding to concerns from a letter sent him from the APA Practice Directorate noting that VA psychologists were not being given the opportunity to apply for the newly created leadership positions in product or service lines in VA medical centers. Kizer's response indicated he was still supporting his March 1995 position (outlined in a letter to Senator Inouye) that the most qualified individual, regardless of professional discipline, could be selected for any integrated department of mental health position and that he would continue to support that policy.

The newsletter included minutes of the mid-winter meetings of the officers and the AVACP business meeting at APA as well as the results of a survey of VA psychology leaders on such questions as whether the senior psychologist was called chief of psychology, to whom did the senior psychologist report, the support given mental health programs by the medical center, and the morale of psychology compared to two years ago. (The survey data is summarized below in a report in the Winter 1999/Spring 2000 newsletter.) Also included were reports of two task groups formed during the Dallas leadership conference, one from a group that was defining

leadership competences and another from a task group focusing on communication. The newsletter concluded with an article by James Besyner, participant in the 1998 AVAPL Training Program for Behavioral and Mental Health Leaders, who noted the changes in the old chief's training program that by now had added psychiatry, social work, and psychiatric nursing leaders (and faculty) with marked success reported from all discipline participants due to the efforts of a successful interdisciplinary faculty.<sup>18</sup>

The Winter 1998 newsletter had production delays with the president's column written after the 1998 holidays. The newsletter was intended to be printed in 1997 to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the association as a commemorative issue that included an article by Jonathan Cummings on the startup of the association (see footnote #2). In another article in that newsletter by Cummings, he described other material he was maintaining in the archives beyond that of the association newsletters such as association by-laws and revisions, position papers, task group reports, surveys, and official AVACP/AVAPL letters sent to APA, Congressional members and others regarding key association concerns. The newsletter also included the names and photos of past association presidents and an overview of the history of VA psychology from 1946–1998 by Rod Baker.

In addition to announcing the second psychology leadership conference in the Winter 1998 newsletter to be held at the end of April, Blusewicz thanked Russell Lemle in his president's column as well as Randy Phelps from the APA Practice Directorate and added thanks to APA for the financial support of the conference and other contributions. His column also congratulated Pat DeLeon for his election to the office of APA president. Blusewicz' column additionally noted that he had received word from NOVA Psi president James Besyner that the membership of NOVA Psi had voted to disband the organization and transfer their remaining funds to AVACP. Blusewicz thanked him for the information and indicated he would ask the officers to set those funds aside to advance goals that had been supported by AVACP and NOVA Psi. The newsletter concluded with a lengthy report compiled by the AVAPL regional representatives and medical centers on news regarding the status of psychology in the VISNs.

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<sup>18</sup> The addition of other mental health disciplines and faculty to the originally named psychology chief's training program resulted from decisions made by association leaders and training faculty with information being received from VAHQ sources that single-discipline leadership training was not in favor and would probably not be funded in the future. The shift in focus to a multi-disciplinary mental health leadership training program resulted in funding of this successful program for the next five years. Faculty and participants were in agreement that the addition of other disciplines only strengthened the program as reported in the September 1998 newsletter and future newsletters such as that noted in the October 1999 issue.

The Spring 1999 newsletter column by Blusewicz noted that the minutes of the mid-winter meeting were included in the newsletter and took the opportunity to note that if he ever had been a bit skeptical about the value of these meetings that the days in Washington had convinced him of the importance of the meetings, adding that the cumulative effort of past visits has made VA psychology visible in significant ways. Blusewicz also indicated that he had received and printed in the newsletter a letter dated March 30, 1999 to AVACP members and all VA psychologists from James Besyner, president of NOVA Psi, explaining the reason for dissolving the organization and encouragement being given to VA psychologists to join AVAPL with its expanded criteria for membership.

Bob Gresen's VAHQ mental health column reported that he had been officially appointed full-time deputy chief consultant until Mary Jansen returned from her leave of absence. He vowed that he would do the best he could to function in that role in his decentralized position in Milwaukee.<sup>19</sup> He added that he did not feel conspicuous in his acting role as there were many in VAHQ serving in acting positions, some for several years. He added the importance of AVAPL members being a productive member of the mental health team at their medical centers and to get out the word of our good work since no one else was likely to step forward to do that.

The newsletter concluded with an article by Jeffrey Burk, chair of the Training Subcommittee of the Psychology Advisory Committee, that announced that a limited number of training positions would be awarded to medical centers in a request for proposals (RFP) for medical centers without funded predoctoral internships. Those successful in competing for new positions would be funded for two years with a requirement that they obtain APA accreditation within that time in order to continue receiving funds. He added that a second RFP would be issued that involved re-competition for medical centers having postdoctoral training positions, excepting those postdoctoral training stipends funded by MIRECCs and interdisciplinary training programs. He noted the reasons for these two RFPs were in part due to the fact that some sites had cut back on the number of predoctoral interns they were training or had eliminated their internships entirely and that the training funds for these positions were temporarily redistributed to other sites on a nonrecurring basis. For the coming training year, those temporary training position distributions had to be assigned based on open competition. Since psychology was now

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<sup>19</sup> Limits on VAHQ space in Washington allowed HQ staff to be centrally funded but perform their Headquarter functions in space provided by medical centers under decentralized position agreements.

emphasizing postdoctoral training, currently funded or newly funded postdoctoral programs could be funded in the second RFP and that they could add postdoctoral training in other areas than PTSD, substance abuse, or gerontology. Postdoctoral programs re-competing for funding in this RFP had to have had their postdoctoral training program accredited by APA. They also could compete for continued and additional funding for postdoctoral positions with the understanding that they would have to give up two predoctoral internship positions for every new postdoctoral training position requested since the latter was funded at stipends twice the funding of predoctoral positions.

The Summer 1999 newsletter was primarily devoted to reports from the Dallas II leadership conference. In his president's column, Blusewicz noted two lessons to be taken from the conference: that VA psychology has earned the right to be treated with respect and has the responsibility to exercise leadership and, secondly, that working together results in successes beyond our expectations. Deputy chief consultant Bob Gresen later illustrated these lessons in his VAHQ column noting that Dr. Kizer had accepted an invitation to present a keynote address for Dallas II and had brought with him copies of a directive that he had just signed entitled "Filling Vacant Leadership Positions in Mental Health." The directive reiterated Kizer's VHA position that he had previously given indicating that the most qualified individuals be selected for integrated leadership positions in mental health regardless of professional discipline. The directive was also published in the newsletter. Gresen additionally announced that the new training RFPs had been received and were being evaluated and that the training stipends for predoctoral internships had been set at \$18,500 and at \$37,000 for postdoctoral residencies.

Russell Lemle's Dallas II report and transcripts of keynote speakers were included in the newsletter with Lemle describing VAHQ, APA, and AVAPL member presentations. Especially noted was Kizer's 90-minute session highlighted by the directive he had just signed and distributed to the audience on filling mental health leadership positions. After his formal remarks, he candidly answered questions from the audience on long-term care, facility closures, Title 38, Title 5 reductions-in-force, the new network organization, training affiliations, Medicare subvention, and his perspective on how things were going so far.

A fall 1999 newsletter was produced in two versions: Autumn 1999 and October 1999. Virtually identical, the Autumn newsletter was sent to a larger VA psychology audience to promote membership with information about the organization and membership that were not

included in the October 1999 newsletter sent to members. Both newsletters carried Jeffrey Burk's incoming president's column expressing his pride in the organization going through a "mourning" period at what was happening to VA psychology to beginning to look at some ways to regain losses and to define ourselves in the new VA. He especially credited a strong alliance with APA, parity with Dr. Kizer's directive, and proactive development of leadership skills in the first two Dallas leadership conferences as responsible for this shift. The newsletter also announced an AVAPL mentoring program for leadership and included a visionaries' view column by Randy Taylor noting the successful use of data by psychologists over the years in program development and patient care. Minutes of the meeting of AVAPL officers and the AVAPL business meeting at APA were added as well as an article by Burk reporting on the status of the Behavioral Health Leadership Training Program and its continued success.

The Winter 1999/Spring 2000 newsletter included Burk's report on the mid-winter meeting in his president's column. He noted that more details were included later in the newsletter but added his highlights on issues addressed. In meeting with APA officials, the AVAPL officers was able to correct an oversight that originally had no VA member on the new APA Commission on Training and Education created to consider what modifications in training might be needed in training the next generation of psychologists. He also announced that the hybrid Title 38 conversion for psychologists and selected other professionals was gaining new life with an initiative from VAHQ that was planned to be submitted to Congress. The president's column additionally noted that a majority of members had indicated in a survey that AVAPL regional representatives be replaced with special interest groups (SIGs) organized by content areas to place more emphasis on "*what* we do instead of *where* we do it." He hoped time would be available at the third leadership conference to discuss and perhaps start some SIGs.

Issues of workload and workload standards began surfacing around the country, and Bob Gresen's deputy chief consultant's column in the newsletter noted that a pilot program developed by Jim Breckenridge (Palo Alto VA) for profiling mental health providers would be used at several sites with a hoped-for status report at the upcoming APA meeting. He had also begun discussions in Headquarters regarding psychological assessment of VA security officers who were soon to be armed in the VA. Further added was his announcement that Laurent (Larry) Lehmann was officially selected as chief consultant for VA mental health and noted that

Lehmann had included an article in the newsletter on his vision for VA mental health in the future.

An article by VA Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Hershel Gober additionally appeared in the newsletter describing VA customer service initiatives in serving America's veterans. He focused on patient safety in his remarks as well as the newly established Center for Women Veterans and increased funding for homeless veterans. He included the results of a national survey of veterans receiving care at the VA that indicated 80% are more satisfied with their care now than two years ago. The visionaries' views column by Randy Taylor spoke to future technology changes in the VA that would affect patient care and shared his view that psychologists will be prescribing medication and other treatments for patients in the new century.

The newsletter additionally included an executive summary report of the survey data from 1999 on the current status of psychology in the VA prepared by 11 psychology chiefs and leaders with findings and recommendations in eight areas. Noted was the fact that most psychology programs exist in some form of interdisciplinary organizational structure headed by a psychiatrist manager, that the vast majority of psychologists continue to have their clinical privileges and peer review directed by a psychologist, and that psychology and other mental health disciplines have experienced a greater reduction in staff within the past two years than non-mental health patient care programs. The latter data raised concerns whether the disproportional cuts of mental health care by medical centers had been intentional. The newsletter ended with the minutes of the mid-winter meeting and reports by AVAPL regional representatives on psychology activities in the VISNs and medical centers.

Burk's president's column in the Summer 2000 newsletter noted that Dallas III, the third psychology leadership conference featured the formation of AVAPL SIGs, some of whom had already begun functioning. He additionally commented on the excellent presentations of APA and VAHQ officials as well as presentations by 15 psychology leaders in medical centers that he listed by name. Russell Lemle's detailed report on conference activities and transcripts of key speakers at the conference were printed in the newsletter, including that of Under Secretary for Health Thomas Garthwaite who had replaced Kizer.

Peggy Cantrell's incoming president's column in the Autumn 2000 newsletter noted what a great time it was to be part of AVAPL and introduced four goals for her year as president: build on organizational structures to accommodate new members, continue to recruit new members,



strengthen the organization through advocacy, and encourage all members to volunteer for organizational activities. Bob Gresen's deputy chief consultant's column noted that Mary Jansen would resume her role as deputy in October and thanked those who had helped him over the last two years with special thanks to the Psychology Advisory Committee.

The newsletter column by Randy Taylor described his ideas on what added-value meant in health care, and the minutes of the AVAPL meetings at APA were included. A training report provided a list of 19 VA sites with postdoctoral training programs that included contact information for their training directors. That report also listed four new predoctoral training programs and contact information for the new training directors.

The president's column by Cantrell in the Mid-winter 2001 newsletter indicated that AVAPL had heard about letters being sent to VA Headquarters concerning the possibility of psychologists receiving prescription authority and that the current independent provider status of psychologists without supervision increased the risk for patient endangerment. The similar language used in these letters raised AVAPL's concerns about a single source used to promote the letter-writing campaign. Discussed with top VAHQ officials during the mid-winter meeting, the officers were told that the VA response to these letters indicated that no plans to give psychologists prescriptive authority were being considered since no state currently provides prescriptive authority for psychologists and that the independent provider status of psychologists in the VA was consistent with state laws and accreditation bodies and would not be changed in VA policy. The report of the officers meeting with VA Secretary Anthony Principi indicated his strong support of mental health services for veterans. The minutes of the mid-winter meeting were included in the newsletter along with an article by Steve Holliday and Peggy Cantrell asking members to respond to invited comment on the proposed changes in APA accreditation requirements. The proposed changes would allow the minimum number of residents in postdoctoral training programs to be changed from two to one along with an increase from five to seven years in the accreditation renewal period for predoctoral training programs. Those changes were adopted by the APA accreditation office after comments were received.

The 2001 Leadership Conference edition of the newsletter was devoted to the outstanding presentations provided attendees at the conference in Las Vegas that was introduced in Peggy Cantrell's president's column. Russell Lemle's conference report was included in the newsletter along with transcripts of the videotaped comments by VA Secretary Anthony Principi, APA

President Norine Johnson, VA psychologist Kathy McNamara, VA psychiatrist Bob Rosenheck, and APA Recording Secretary Ron Levant. The president's column also focused on the need for psychologists to be involved in proactive advocacy, a major theme in the leadership conference. It was further noted that four reports were included in the newsletter from the Addictions, Primary Care, Research, and Training SIGS. The newsletter editor, June Malone, announced that with the by-laws change approved by members to replace regional representatives with SIG chairs this would be the last newsletter with the names of the regional representatives.

Judith Patterson's comments in the president's column for the AVAPL 2001 APA newsletter edition began by reflecting on all of the changes in her life and that of others since becoming AVAPL president just a few months ago and described a moving account of the impact of the September 11 terrorist attacks. She added stories about psychologists helping others to deal with the aftermath of trauma of those attacks, her personal difficulties driving to work at the Brooklyn VA with increased security, and spoke of renewed energy of treating veterans with their reactivated memories of events in their own past. She used these remarks to comment on mental health being recognized as an essential component of health, the changes in AVAPL preparing for a revised role in the VA, and segued into the importance of the VA psychology leadership conferences. Her column also included mention of the excellence of presentations at APA and highlighted a symposium on "Women and Leadership" chaired by Dolly Sadow. The newsletter editor added the comments made by speakers at that symposium which included Dolly Sadow's introduction and those of presenters Mary Jansen, Judith Patterson, Kathy McNamara, and Peggy Cantrell.

Also included in this newsletter was Mary Jansen's VACO deputy chief consultant column adding two items of interest from mental health in Headquarters in its plans to update the psychosis practice guidelines and plans for training in psychosocial rehabilitation. The minutes of the AVAPL business meeting at APA were added to this newsletter as well as an update from the Addictions SIG.

The 2002 Mid-winter newsletter highlighted officer concerns presented during the meetings by Patterson in her president's column. She began her list of issues with maintaining quality mental health and behavioral health services with decreasing resources and added issues of retention and promotion opportunities for VA psychologists, hybrid Title 38, C&P exams, and an improved budget that still would not fund care for all veterans expected to seek health care in the

VA next year. The minutes of those meetings were included in this issue that noted that VA Secretary Principi shared AVACP's concerns for the budget with increased enrollment of veterans without sufficient funding to care for them.

The 2002 leadership conference report described an extensive list of APA, VAHQ, and AVAPL member presentations continuing the message of the need for advocacy leadership. Lemle especially noted Robert Roswell's presentation as the new under secretary for health in the VA that opened the door for psychologists to play essential roles in the VA and Roswell's receptivity to psychologists using prescriptive authority and serving as team members delivering care to patients in telehealth. He added his concern that eligibility reform has dramatically increased the number of enrolled veterans that jeopardized the care that can be given.<sup>20</sup>

Speakers for the 2002 leadership conference additionally included Laura Miller, assistant deputy undersecretary for health in the VA, who promoted system roles for psychologists in organization development consultation and prompted psychologists to apply for the VA's Executive Leadership Development Program. Larry Lehmann, VAHQ chief consultant for mental health, updated attendees on capacity shortages for substance abuse patients and for care of elderly patients and reminded attendees that financial support for in-person gatherings like that of the AVAPL leadership conferences was being harder to obtain and that funding was being shifted to teleconferences and satellite meetings. Lemle took the opportunity at this point in his report to note that this reduced funding was likely responsible for a 10% drop in attendance at the leadership conference from the past conference.

Jon Cummings, AVAPL's archivist, spoke briefly at the association business meeting at the APA convention in Chicago as part of activities celebrating AVAPL's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary (2002 APA edition newsletter). He gave a brief description of the beginning of the organization and described AVAPL as one of the important developments of psychology in the VA. The newsletter carried photos of that meeting and a social hour during APA as well as reproduced the first page of the first AVACP newsletter in 1978. During the AVAPL business meeting at APA, Judith Patterson had announced that a Special Contribution Award had been given to Ray Fowler, APA's CEO, during the 2002 leadership conference, and Ken Adams later used his first

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<sup>20</sup> Although the reports of the psychology leadership conference held in 2002 were not published in any newsletter due to a missing newsletter or a proposed issue not being published, the report of that conference was provided for this history by Russell Lemle (personal communication, October 17, 2016.)

president's column to comment on the friendship and working relations AVAPL had with Fowler (2003 Mid-winter and Leadership newsletter).

Mary Jansen's VACO deputy chief consultant's column reported on several issues beginning with her meetings with the VAHQ office of human relations in identifying facilities not following the equal access policy for applicants by psychologists for integrated mental health leadership positions in the field. She also described meetings with VAHQ classification staff to find better ways to classify leadership positions when a psychologist was essentially appointed to function in a former chief's position. She noted one solution would be to develop a directive to require each VA facility to appoint a psychologist administrator who would be given time to carry out these duties and noted her efforts in developing what was later called the psychologist executive directive. The minutes of the AVAPL meetings at APA were published in this newsletter as well as an updated report by the Training SIG.

The beginning of 2003 started with the 2003 Mid-winter and Leadership newsletter describing meetings of the AVAPL officers in Washington that featured updates on hybrid Title 38 for psychology and the proposed psychologist executive directive (no significant movement on either). The report of the successful sixth VA psychology leadership conference followed with Russell Lemle describing presentations and program activities, including transcripts of keynote comments by Russ Newman (APA Practice Directorate) on building resilience and by Robert Sternberg (APA President) describing a model for developing expert leaders.

In his president's column for this first newsletter of the year, Kenneth Adams expressed his opinion that all VA psychologists needed to be members of APA, the VA Section of Division 18, and AVAPL in order to work together in moving forward on the issues before us. He ended his column noting that we were living in the "exciting times" expressed in the Chinese proverb of well-wishing in this newsletter. In the 2003 APA Edition newsletter that included his remarks at the AVAPL business meeting at APA, his report at APA on achievements during his year as AVAPL president described the year as "turbulent."

With the 2003 APA Edition newsletter printed after the APA meeting, however, incoming AVAPL president Steve Holliday was able to begin his first president's column with the announcement that the legislation that included hybrid Title 38 conversion for psychologists and several other disciplines was signed into law December 6, 2003. He additionally noted, however,

that there was no word on the expected publication of the psychology executive directive.<sup>21</sup> Mary Jansen's deputy chief consultant's column alerted members to the VA's concern regarding clinic access and the need to reduce waiting times and assure timely access to veterans needing care. The president's column also contained the announcement that Mary Jansen's contract as VACO deputy chief consultant was not going to be renewed.

Although not reported in any newsletter, in the middle of 2003 the 21st AVAPL leadership training program (now named The Behavioral Health Leadership Training Program) was held for 36 psychology, psychiatry, social work, and psychiatric nurse participants. That brought the total number of participants during the 21 training programs to almost 500. It would be the last leadership training program sponsored by AVAPL, however, with funding withdrawn to support other management training initiatives.<sup>22,23</sup>

The mounting concerns of AVAPL with the erosion of mental health staff and programs and the inability to meet new demands from increased eligibility enrollment of veterans had in fact been noted in annual reports to the under secretary for health by the VA's Committee on Care of Veterans with Serious Mental Illness (CCVSMI). This congressionally-mandated committee, now co-chaired by past AVAPL president Stephen Cavicchia and Miklos Losonczy, chief psychiatrist from the Lyons/East Orange VA medical center, had even prepared a first attempt of a mental health strategic plan that outlined capacity problems in the VA to help the VA respond to a 2002 Senate Veterans Affairs Committee request of the VA to provide a budget estimate of costs to fully fund care for veterans with serious mental illness. The CCVSMI outline of capacity problems and information to help the VA restore capacity, however, was ignored in the VA's response to the CCVSMI's annual capacity report to Congress. In a VA response in 2004 to the

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<sup>21</sup> When Antonette Zeiss came to VACO in 2005 as deputy chief consultant for mental health, the psychology executive directive was still stalled but the concept of every mental health service needing a clear leader of that profession with independent authority was written into the *Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook* published in 2008 (Antonette Zeiss, personal communication, February 7, 2017.)

<sup>22</sup> All training material and programs as well as participant lists and evaluation reports are stored in non-digital form at the VA psychology archives at CCHP. The 2001 and 2003 training program materials were placed on CDs and given to participants before the program and are also stored at CCHP.

<sup>23</sup> The Behavioral Health Leadership Training Program was re-started in 2005 by the Employee Education System in cooperation with and leadership of the Office of Mental Health Services in VACO and has been held annually to the present time.

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, the VA indicated that it was unable to provide a useful estimate of costs to fully fund care for veterans with serious mental illness.<sup>24</sup>

In one of their meetings with the new acting under secretary for health, Dr. Jonathan Perlin showed Cavicchia and Losonczy a letter he had received from Senators Rockefeller and Graham indicating that they were not pleased with the VA's response to their request to estimate costs to fully fund mental health care after a two-year wait. As co-chairs of the CCVSMI, Cavicchia and Losonczy offered to co-sign a letter with Perlin to the Senators that would support the funding and implementation of a strategic mental health plan to restore mental health care capacity. With his previously expressed interest in such a plan, Perlin agreed and a letter was sent to and accepted by the Senate. The VA then proceeded to develop the plan with input from CCVSMI.

With Perlin's commitment to strategic planning and enhanced funding for mental health services to veterans, an already functioning mental health strategic planning group in the VA's Mental Health Service, led by acting chief consultant Mark Shelhorse, expanded their efforts which grew into a comprehensive mental health strategic plan (MHSP) for the VA. The MHSP was approved by the under secretary for health and later by the secretary for the VA in November 2004.

Antonette Zeiss from the Palo Alto VA, who had been involved in the planning group for the MHSP, applied for and was selected as VACO deputy chief consultant for mental health and began that appointment in September 2005. With Congressional annual funding in the first years of the MHSP for \$200 million and later over \$535 million, Zeiss reported that almost all of those funds were spent for new mental health staffing and projects that would have recurring funds. It can be noted that Zeiss later became the first woman and first psychologist appointed as VACO chief consultant in heading all mental health services in the VA.<sup>25</sup>

In 2006, Ira Katz was hired as chief consultant for mental health in what was now called the deputy chief patient care services officer for mental health. He not only committed himself to working with Zeiss to implement the MHSP but led the creation of the handbook for the *Uniform*

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<sup>24</sup> The information in this and the next paragraph was taken from Stephen Cavicchi's VA career story in *More stories from VA psychology* (Cavicchia, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> The information for the two previous and the succeeding paragraph was taken from Antonette Zeiss' VA career story in *More stories from VA psychology* (A. Zeiss, 2013).

*Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics*. The handbook described a mental health service system to govern the services available for eligible veterans.<sup>26</sup>

The MHSP development and implementation as well as that for the handbook occupied much of the AVAPL's attention during these years which included reports and presentations in the annual psychology leadership conferences. VA psychology was also being given renewed attention and support during these years. At the eighth annual leadership conference in Dallas in 2005, VA Deputy Secretary Gordon Mansfield delivered a keynote address but additionally asked AVAPL to provide him with the results and recommendations that came out of the conference. Seven topics and 10 recommendations were forwarded to him in a letter by the co-sponsors of the conference represented by AVAPL president Terence Keane, Russ Newman for the APA Practice Directorate, and Robert Goldberg, president of Division 18. Mansfield returned that letter thanking them for the response and added a fact sheet describing the VA's response and progress regarding each recommendation sent him.<sup>27</sup>

The activities of AVAPL during the last four years of this decade from 2004-2007 also cover a period taking VA psychology through the greatest increase and surge of mental health program staffing and funding since the end of World War II. As of June 2005, acting deputy of mental health Bob Gresen noted that the VA employed over 1,500 full and part time clinical and counseling psychologists in non-research positions (Baker & Pickren, 2007). That number grew to 3,500 in 2010 and reached over 5,200 in the next decade. The pleasure of psychology leaders with this staffing increase for staffing and programs to provide care to veterans was tempered by the time it took to hire the new staff and the need to find new office space in medical centers. Zeiss (2013) also reported helping psychology leaders maintain the objectives of the MHSP with VISN concerns whether this new influx of staffing for the MHSP was really called for and medical center director concerns whether the funding would be recurring and become part of their base budgets in future years.

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<sup>26</sup> The document can be retrieved at [https://r.search.yahoo.com/\\_ylt=A0LEVv5BbDBZ118A7zcPxQt.;\\_ylu=X3oDMTByOHZyb21tBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzcg--/RV=2/RE=1496374466/RO=10/RU=https%3a%2f%2fwww.va.gov%2fvhapublications%2fViewPublication.asp%3fpub\\_ID%3d1762/RK=1/RS=N1sb1f.Z75ac.woiamXPjUyZ6zE-](https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=A0LEVv5BbDBZ118A7zcPxQt.;_ylu=X3oDMTByOHZyb21tBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzcg--/RV=2/RE=1496374466/RO=10/RU=https%3a%2f%2fwww.va.gov%2fvhapublications%2fViewPublication.asp%3fpub_ID%3d1762/RK=1/RS=N1sb1f.Z75ac.woiamXPjUyZ6zE-)

<sup>27</sup> Both letters can be viewed on the AVAPL website at <http://www.avapl.org> in the VA Psychology Leadership Conference presentation's page for 2005.

In a brief return to publishing an AVAPL newsletter, Kathleen McNamara's remarks in her president's column for the June 2006 newsletter included thanks to Ann Landes for volunteering to serve as editor.<sup>28</sup> McNamara also commented on the AVAPL mid-winter meetings in February and noted a respect for VA psychology in meetings with VAHQ, APA, members of Congress and their key staff, and representatives of veterans' service organizations. The positive tenor of the meetings addressed issues ranging from C&P exams to prescriptive authority to homeless veterans issues to issues for returning veterans from the Middle East with depression and anxiety. Detailed minutes of who they met with and topics discussed were included in the newsletter. McNamara further described the presentations and activities at the annual psychology leadership conference that featured new models of care and topics on chronic pain, primary care, and needs of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans.

Jamie Adler, AVAPL president, and conference chair June Malone welcomed attendees to the 10<sup>th</sup> leadership conference in Dallas in May 2007 along with co-sponsor representatives Randy Phelps representing APA and the Practice Directorate and Robert Zeiss representing the VA Section of Division 18. The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference featured a keynote address by Sharon Brehm, president of APA, entitled "APA and VA Psychology: An Enduring Partnership." That title mirrored the partnership theme of Norm Abeles' keynote address in the first conference in his role as past president of APA. The conference theme promoted changing paradigms for leadership and clinical applications with presentations on psychosocial rehabilitation, advances in telehealth care, traumatic brain injury assessment and treatment, and organizational development.

#### The Fourth Decade: 2008–2017

In 2008, Robert Zeiss was appointed director for Associated Health Education in the Office of Academic Affiliations with oversight of the psychology training program and the VA's other associated health training programs. He previously served as a health systems specialist in that office starting in 2005 and was able to see the same growth in funded psychology training positions at that time that was being seen in psychology staffing for mental health programs.

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<sup>28</sup> The July 2006 newsletter as well as future digital newsletters can be electronically retrieved in the newsletter section of the AVAPL website at <http://www.avapl.org>



Zeiss noted that even with the 2008 recession when he assumed the director's role for associated health education that there were no threats to the psychology training budget or that of other associated health training programs. Both the VA secretary and Congress had high regard for and supported the VA's education mission and affiliated training. He added that he never had to cut training programs and was always able to continue funding new training positions. Zeiss said that he was not sure he fully deserved the supportive reputation he had in the field but did acknowledge that it was better to be the bearer of good news than the bearer of bad news. He reported a 59% increase in psychology predoctoral training positions from 2005 to the beginning of FY14 bringing that total to 570. For the same time 10-year period, a 314% increase in the number of psychology postdoctoral training positions rose to 302 for a total of 872 funded positions.<sup>29</sup>

The new decade, however, raised issues among psychology leaders with hybrid Title 38. AVAPL presidents Steven Lovett, Mark Hinterthuer, and June Malone faced the association's first concerns with the emerging difficulties of using the qualification standards and boarding procedures under hybrid Title 38 to upgrade positions to GS-14 and GS-15.<sup>30</sup>

The 2008 VA Psychology Leadership Conference featured highly-rated presentations on VA and Department of Defense initiatives for returning troops. Also reported were collaborative research efforts of the VA and National Guard identifying factors promoting resilience and recovery in National Guard soldiers (evaluation data provided by Jeff Burk, AVAPL webmaster, personal communication, November 15, 2016.) The 2009 VA Psychology Leadership conference featured presentations describing the vision, goals, and principles of the *Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook* published in 2008 and an update on implementation of hybrid Title 38 authority in the VA.

The 13<sup>th</sup> leadership conference moved to San Antonio in 2010 with a theme of advancing VA psychology in the evolving veterans' health care system. That conference featured presentations on the continued challenge of homelessness among veterans, an overview of family services supported by VA mental health, and evidence based practice and outcomes (the latter presented in a keynote address by APA President Carol Goodheart).

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<sup>29</sup> This Information was taken from Robert Zeiss' VA career story in *More stories from VA psychology* (R. Zeiss, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> With the untimely death of James Besyner while president-elect of AVAPL, June Malone was elected to replace him as AVAPL president.

One electronic newsletter was printed in 2011 (Summer 2011 electronic edition) with AVAPL president George Shorter able to report on a successful psychology leadership conference with an attendance that topped 200 for the first time. The conference had by that time established its importance and had become the largest annual assembly of VA psychologists, exceeding attendance at AVAPL and VACO mental health meetings at the APA conventions. During the 2011 leadership conference, the conference leadership advocacy award was introduced and first given to Patrick DeLeon, a VA trainee, a long-time VA supporter, and a past APA president. The award was named after him and presented annually at subsequent leadership conferences.

The keynote address by APA President Melba Vasquez focused on APA's role in meeting the needs of military service members, veterans, and their families. Acting Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health George Arana, however, described another reorganization in Central Office (which he referred to as a realignment). VA Operations and Management (O&M), responsible for guiding policy implementation, had established an Office of Mental Health Operations within O&M to monitor compliance with VA mental health priorities in medical centers. That office would be headed by psychologist Mary Schohn and would support the Office of Patient Care Services where health programs and policies were created, including mental health. Schohn also presented at the conference to describe the leadership vision for that realignment which would provide resources to support the activities of the mental health office in VACO by assisting the field in collecting performance data. Antonette Zeiss further helped attendees understand the realignment in her presentation in her newly titled position as the VACO Acting Deputy Chief Patient Care Services Officer for Mental Health.<sup>31</sup>

Shorter also briefly described the AVAPL mid-winter meeting in the newsletter but detailed minutes of that meeting with VACO, APA, and other officials were stored on the AVAPL website. He noted one objective was to find out more about the VACO reorganization, including mental health offices, and its impact on the field. They met with Mary Schohn, acting director of Mental Health Operations, and Antonette Zeiss, acting deputy chief for mental health, with Zeiss reporting she was pleased that VACO now had many psychologists in key leadership positions

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<sup>31</sup> The 1996 Mental Health Strategic Healthcare Group designation for mental health services had been dropped in 2005 (Bob Gresen, personal communication, January 9, 2017) with several other official names subsequently used to designate mental health leadership in VACO, described generically in this narrative as VACO mental health. It is unclear when the popular VACO acronym officially replaced VAHQ (no later than 2011), but speakers at leadership conference programs going back to 2006 had continued to use the VACO acronym in their titles.

and that the challenges faced were not as difficult as those in past years. The AVACP officers noted a concern expressed in the field that staff psychologists were being asked to help with the increased demand for C&P exams that reduced their time with their assigned patient care workload. Zeiss acknowledged that VACO was recommending the use of psychology staff for C&P exams but was also considering hiring examiners who would perform exams using telehealth modalities.

A single newsletter was again printed for 2012 (April 2012 electronic edition). Pam Fischer, AVAPL president, reported a sense of renewal and optimism for the future of veteran's health care from their mid-winter meetings with VACO, APA, and VACO officials and with Congressional staffers. Highlights of those meetings were included in the newsletter, but the more detailed minutes of those meetings on the AVAPL website indicated that the officers raised concerns in VACO meetings regarding promotions to GS-14 and 15 levels and the need for clarity regarding mapping their time to various clinical and administrative activities as well as workload expectations. Antonette Zeiss, acting deputy chief for mental health in VACO, noted that a staffing model is pending approval that will clarify mapping and productivity issues. She acknowledged that promotion decisions were made at the facility or VISN level and is unevenly applied, but that at this point the only option available to those seeking promotions is to appeal the decision. She added that some have done so with success.

The theme for the 2012 leadership conference focused on new directions and technologies for health care with presentations on telemental health as well as using mental health treatment planning software and web-based self-help programs and social media to help the veteran. That year the conference Patrick DeLeon Advocacy Award was given to Bob Gresen.

Association minutes for the 2013 mid-winter meeting indicated that the officers planned to raise concerns of members in meetings with VACO officials regarding travel restrictions as well as promotion problems at the GS-14 and 15 levels. The minutes reported that the AVAPL officers were again told that there were no options other than appeal for those turned down for promotion since those decisions were made at the medical center and VISN level. Travel restrictions were acknowledged as a problem by VACO officials, especially in the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) with the need to train staff and with travel restrictions interpreted differently by some medical centers. OAA indicated some clarification of changes had already been made.

While meeting with the acting chief consultant for mental health in VACO, David Carroll, the officers were told that VACO planned to hire 1600 mental health staff for the field and 800 peer specialists. AVAPL officers later heard from Jeff Burk, national mental health director for Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Services in VACO, that a White House Executive Order had mandated the hiring of 800 peer specialists in the VA by the end of calendar year 2013. This action came after little had been done by the VA to provide peer support services required in a 2008 public law. That law had not been well-received by VA psychologists who had concerns with professional responsibility, scope of practice and VA psychology losing jobs to less expensive peer support specialists.<sup>32</sup>

The May 2013 psychology leadership conference featured 25 presentations with 200 participants and a theme of welcoming veterans home from OEF/OIF with a focus on reintegration and recovery. Conference reports noted that Randy Phelps was given the conference's annual advocacy award.

2013 also marked the year when concerns and problems with the hybrid Title 38 recruitment and promotion policies led AVAPL to again consider seeking Title 38 inclusion for psychologists. Although hybrid Title 38 had produced many more GS-14 and 15 positions for psychologists than ever before, those grade levels had been primarily limited to psychologists with administrative responsibilities. The grade level for psychologists in non-administrative positions was still mostly restricted to the GS-13, Step 10 grade salary level, and senior staff psychologists approaching that full performance salary level saw no room for advancement and left the VA seeking other opportunities, sometimes to university faculty jobs where salaries were as much as 50% higher in comparable senior positions. At a number of VA facilities, boarding packets were not being forwarded to the VACO mental health performance standards board for review. Others were told they would not be promoted because the associate director of the medical center was at that level and had a much more complex job than a psychologist (complexity being one defining characteristic of grade classification and pay under the Title 5 provisions used in hybrid Title 38.) Under full Title 38, however, position salaries were based on national reviews of salary levels in the profession, and physicians often had salaries exceeding that of the associate director. AVAPL believed that these problems could not be resolved if

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<sup>32</sup> This information was taken from David Carroll's VA career story in *Even more stories from VA psychology* (Carroll, 2017).

psychologists stayed in hybrid Title 38 (Jeff Burk, personal communication, November 17, 2016).

As AVAPL past president in 2013, Mary Levenson began working on a position paper outlining pros and cons of hybrid and full Title 38 policies which Jody Rubenstein later took on while president and was in turn given to Mary Beth Shea when Rubenstein retired and Shea was elected treasurer (Mary Beth Shea, personal communication, November 18, 2016).<sup>33</sup> AVAPL communicated a growing interest in Title 38 with APA and VACO officials during the 2014 mid-winter meeting. The APA Practice Directorate indicated a willingness to initiate legislative inquiry for moving VA psychologists to Title 38 if VA psychology leaders and staff were supporting it, and requested a briefing paper on the issue from AVAPL before proceeding. Shea continued developing the position paper with other AVAPL leaders and a representative of Human Resources in VACO. She reported at the AVAPL officers' call of April 16, 2015 that she had collected input from the membership with 90% agreeing to move forward on Title 38, and submitted her draft to the rest of the AVAPL officers for final review in August. The position paper was forwarded to the APA Practice Directorate with Heather Kelly later reporting at the AVAPL business meeting at APA that the Practice Directorate will be looking for ways to advance Title 38.<sup>34,35</sup>

In addition to 2014 being the year of a renewed quest for Title 38, that year also introduced negative newspaper reports around the country on the part of some medical centers accused of altering patient access timeliness data to appear to be in compliance with performance standards, a reputation concern raised at the AVAPL annual APA convention in August. Congressional concerns led to passage of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 which required the VA to provide non-VA care to enrolled veterans if the VA was unable to provide an appointment within 30 days or lived more than 40 miles from the nearest VA medical facility.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jody Rubenstein was selected as association president in the 2013 election to replace John Klocek who was president-elect but unable to assume the role of president after leaving the VA.

<sup>34</sup> The position paper can be viewed or retrieved from the AVAPL website at <http://www.avapl.org/pub/Title%2038%20White%20Paper%20AVAPL.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Kelly had replaced Randy Phelps as the AVAPL working liaison with APA and as APA representative to the psychology leadership planning committee in 2014 after Phelps' responsibilities changed at APA.

<sup>36</sup> The 2014 Choice Act legislation can be retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-113publ146/pdf/PLAW-113publ146.pdf>

The legislation additionally established a Congressional Commission of Care to evaluate access to care in VA health care systems.

The theme of the 2014 leadership conference in May was serving veterans through interprofessional care and expanding partnerships with 166 participants. Kathy McNamara was awarded the conference's advocacy award that year.

In the January 2015 AVAPL newsletter, John McQuaid used his president's column to thank managing editor Genevieve Davis and other editorial staff for reintroducing the newsletter at an important period of transition and change in the VA and the importance of being in touch with members. McQuaid introduced three areas in which AVAPL was taking action, the first addressed the resurgence of interest in Title 38 for VA psychologists for appropriate salaries and improved flexibility in hiring. He also noted that an AVAPL group was developing a proposal for psychologists to be able to conduct vesting visits in order for medical centers to be fully reimbursed in the VERA budgeting system. Finally noted was a new approved compensation and pension (C&P) special interest group in the AVAPL governance structure to help members dealing with challenges in conducting C&P exams.

The newsletter also contained a report by Stacy Pommer and Kenneth Jones of the VA Office of Academic Affiliations that updated members on the VA psychology training program. The report noted that there were 949 predoctoral and postdoctoral training positions for the 2014-2015 training year, a number that had doubled over the last 10 years.

At the 2015 mid-winter meetings, the AVAPL officers met with VACO and APA officials and visited with veteran service organization and Congressional staffers with a prominent message of the improved hiring practices and promotions under Title 38 and AVAPL support of converting VA psychologists to Title 38. Also discussed with those officials were the impact of the Veterans Choice Act of 2014 and other issues needing attention in the C&P program. They met with newly appointed Harold Kudler, chief mental health consultant, who informed them that the split between VACO mental health and the VACO Office of Mental Health Operations might be reversed.

McQuaid's president's column for the June 2015 newsletter commented on the excellence of research presentations at the May leadership conference that looked at ways to improve the veterans' VA experience and added a comment about the enthusiasm that attendees had in bringing their talents to veterans in meaningful ways. In his column, McQuaid further

encouraged members to reach for opportunities to take leadership roles in their facilities and to participate in the AVAPL's mentoring programs. The newsletter also included a list of 22 lessons learned in mentoring and an announcement that certification in geropsychology had been recognized by ABPP in December 2014. The report of the 2015 leadership conference that year, still with 200 participants, indicated that Heather Kelly who represented APA and the Practice Directorate on the conference planning committee had been chosen to receive the conference's advocacy award.

Comments from AVAPL president Thomas Kirchberg in the January 2016 newsletter noted that AVAPL was focused on countering inaccurate information in the press about VA healthcare and had joined with the Association of VA Social Workers, APA, and the National Association of Social Workers in preparing a document that corrects some of the myths being circulated about the VA.<sup>37</sup> He also noted that AVAPL was working with veteran service organizations to oppose efforts to increase funding for non-VA care at the expense of VA resources and to educate the public and Congress about the potential downsides of privatizing services currently provided by the VA. He finally noted the results of a nationwide survey indicating that veterans oppose the privatization of VA healthcare programs. The newsletter also featured a report by Russell Lemle on the Veterans Choice Act of 2014 and its Choice Card Program. The report described eight myths about VA health care and choice program expansion.

The July 2016 newsletter's president's column by Kirchberg contained summaries of several AVAPL presentations made between January and June of 2016 to overcome well-funded efforts to privatize the VA. The January 2016 presentations before the Commission on Care, formed to evaluate veteran access to care in the VA, documented a review of empirical studies showing the effectiveness of VA behavioral health programs. The March 2016 presentation by Russell Lemle and his research team at the San Francisco VA provided the Commission on Care with a review of VA health care covering the past 20 years indicating superior care provided by the VA when compared to other health care organizations on a wide variety of healthcare measures. Kirchberg added that the review helped to slow efforts of dismantling the VA healthcare system and turn the VA into a for-profit business.

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<sup>37</sup> That document can be viewed or retrieved on the AVAPL website at <http://advocacy.avapl.org/pubs/Briefing%20Sheet%20October%202022.%202015.pdf>

In June 2016, Kirchberg and Lemle represented AVAPL at a conference entitled “Keeping the Promise: What’s Next for the VA?” sponsored by the Roosevelt Institute and the Union of Veterans Council. A number of high-ranking VACO officials also spoke at that conference but, for Kirchberg, his newsletter column listed three facts presented by the Rand Corporation that had special importance: (1) the VA outperforms all other healthcare organizations on 45 of 47 outpatient care measures, (2) the VA outperforms all other healthcare organizations on 26 of 37 inpatient care measures, and (3) the VA outperforms all other mental healthcare organizations studied by 30% on every indicator.

The July 2016 newsletter also included a report that there were 180 attendees at the 19<sup>th</sup> leadership conference. A report and discussion on the changing national policy environment alerted attendees to the importance of paying attention to attempts to privatize the VA system. The report additionally noted that the conference 2016 Patrick DeLeon Advocacy Award was presented to Russell Lemle.

The minutes of the 2016 AVAPL business meeting at the APA convention indicated that membership was 413 as of June 30, 2016. Also noted was approval of a new AVAPL women in leadership special interest group. An APA coordination report was given by Heather Kelly who noted that there was no progress in moving VA psychologists into Title 38 since it had not been included in a major legislation bill. Her report included note of APA’s continued support and perceived value of the leadership conferences. She added that AVAPL’s participation on Commission on Care hearings was excellent and that APA and AVAPL had co-signed a critique of the report. The meeting also featured comments by outgoing AVAPL president Kirchberg and incoming president Ron Girona, both of whom spoke of past and future efforts to prevent privatization of the VA.

Other topics raised during the AVAPL meeting at the APA convention included questions regarding prescription privileges for psychologists being reviewed in VACO. That review had been raising a concern among some in VACO about pulling psychologists away from other roles. Support for establishing an APA office for veterans and military policy was also discussed. Still another topic introduced was whether AVAPL should again change its name because the name still had some psychologists unaware that they were eligible for membership.

The officers of AVAPL started 2017 by meeting with APA leadership, key VACO officials, VSO representatives, and Congressional members and staffers at its mid-winter meeting. The



past year's activities of AVAPL in partnering with VSOs and others to address arguments used by supporters of care of veterans by non-VA sources to increase access to care as well as future advocacy plans featured prominently in all discussions. With the ending of the 2014 Choice Act in 2017 and the upcoming Congressional debate in renewing the Choice Act by the end of the year, AVAPL leaders chose several arguments to guide their advocacy efforts. Central to their arguments would be the Rand Corporation data indicating the excellence of VA integrated care of veterans, especially in mental health where the VA exceeded performance of other sources of mental health care on every dimension studied.<sup>38</sup> Also of concern for attention was the outline of plans by a number of Choice Act supporters to by-pass any required vetting or accountability standards for non-VA providers in the upcoming Congressional debate for renewal of the Choice Act. AVAPL leaders were also pleased with their strong relationships with VSOs with their request and use of AVAPL performance data and arguments against privatization that the VSO's used to inform their members and Congressional supporters.

During the mid-winter meetings, association leaders were generally pleased to hear that VA Secretary David Shulkin was supportive of Title 38 conversion for psychologists and many other provider groups in the VA. Although conversion to Title 38 would introduce new issues, the conversion would provide some relief to AVAPL concerns that the Title 5 provisions in hybrid Title 38 were blocking step increases and promotion to the GS-14 grade for senior, non-management psychologist position in the VA.

In March, AVAPL leaders applauded the decision by APA to establish a director for Veterans and Military Health Policy and that Heather O'Beirne Kelly would become the first director. In her new role, Kelly would use her 19 years of experience in the APA Science Directorate where she led APA efforts to address military and veteran issues and would join the government relations office of the APA Practice Directorate and work across directorates to ensure that military and veteran issues would be addressed.

Celebration activities for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the psychology leadership conferences highlighted the 2017 leadership conference in May. Sixteen past presidents of AVACP and AVAPL and other former VA psychology leaders attended to help commemorate the occasion. The conference keynote address featured a history of the twenty conferences that described what

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<sup>38</sup> The report can be viewed/retrieved at <http://advocacy.avapl.org/pubs/Comparing%20VA%20and%20Non-VA%20Quality%20of%20Care.pdf>

led up to the need and planning for the conference, activities in the first conferences, and planning strategies leading to the conference successes.<sup>39</sup>

The conference theme additionally focused on engaging partners in shaping the future of VA integrated care. An invited presentation by a senior behavioral scientist at the Rand Corporation provided a comprehensive outline of sustainable issues in partnering with non-VA sources to meet the mental health needs of veterans and their families. The presentation included the data previously discussed and referenced at the 2017 mid-winter meeting showing that VA mental health care performance exceeded performance of other non-VA sources of mental health care on all dimensions studied.

The leadership conference also provided attendees with the activities of and discussion and response received by AVAPL leadership during the mid-winter meeting summarized earlier. The conference advocacy award was presented to John McQuaid. The conference planners additionally announced the establishment of the Russell B. Lemle Leadership Award to honor those who build VA psychology communities, empower psychologists to encourage and care for one another, and promote leadership development to ultimately improve mental health care for the veterans we serve. Russell Lemle was presented this award as the inaugural recipient to recognize his unwavering support for veterans and the profession and his leadership in developing and maintaining the psychology leadership conference for the past 20 years.

A report from VACO by Mental Health Operations Director David Carroll noted the VA secretary's five priorities, one of which was suicide prevention. His presentation outlined a number of initiatives that are designed to improve the veteran experience and access to care and that will likely adjust the current Choice Act provisions related to 40 miles and 30 days. He also reported that the VA had made a decision to combine the independent mental health operations office established in 2011 with the long-standing office of mental health services in VACO. Wendy Tenhula, the deputy chief consultant for the office of mental health services in VACO updated attendees on activities of that program office to include recently announced plans the VA had to provide urgent mental health care to former service members with other than

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<sup>39</sup> The keynote address contains more details about the activities at the conferences than is in this history and is stored in the VA psychology archives at CCHP. The history may also be viewed and downloaded from the AVACP website at <http://conference.avapl.org/Agenda%20Archive/2017%20Agenda.html>

honorable administrative discharges. Her report additionally noted that as of March 31, 2017 there were 5,378 doctoral psychologists in the VA.

In his report from the Office of Academic Affiliations, the director of Associated Health Education, Kenneth Jones, noted that the 2016-2017 psychology training class of 644 interns and 422 postdoctoral residents was nearing completion of their training and represented the 70<sup>th</sup> VA psychology training class with the first class starting in the fall of 1946. He additionally noted that the 71<sup>st</sup> class for 2017-2018 would have 696 interns and 449 postdocs for a total of 1,145 funded psychology training positions.

Still another beginning for the 2017 leadership conference was the first meeting of the AVAPL women in leadership special interest group established last year. Presentations included information for advancement opportunities for women interested in management careers in the VA both within and outside of mental health and guidance for developing leadership careers. Data was also presented that showed that women now represent 62% of all doctoral psychologists in the VA and that women outnumber men in the GS-13 and GS-14 grade level positions but still had fewer women (32%) than men in the GS-15 grade positions in the VA.

At the end of the conference, attendees were invited to join other VA psychologists in a special meeting to be held the day before the start of the APA convention in August to continue the conference theme discussions of strengthening partnerships with stakeholders invested in supporting the VA, identifying ways in which VA psychologists can enhance the VA, and engaging leaders in a discussion about the future of the VA. Also attending the meeting will be representatives from Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), representatives from AFGE, and VACO leaders. Attendees were finally reminded of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AVACP/AVAPL to be noted at the APA annual meeting this summer.

In concluding this narrative of the four decades of AVACP/AVAPL history, the 40 individuals serving as its president through 2017 are listed in Table 1.

Table 1  
 Presidents of AVACP and AVAPL

Years	President
1978 – 1979	Oakley S. Ray (Nashville)
1979 – 1980	Harold R. Dickman (Palo Alto)
1980 – 1981	Sidney Cleveland (Houston)
1981 – 1982	Jonathan W. Cummings (Washington, DC)
1982 – 1983	Rodney R. Baker (San Antonio)
1983 – 1984	Philip R. Laughlin (Knoxville, IA)
1984 – 1985	Orville Lips (North Chicago)
1985 – 1986	Tom W. Patterson (Topeka)
1986 – 1987	Thomas W. Miller (Lexington)
1987 – 1988	Kenneth L. Bloom (Bronx)
1988 – 1989	Kenneth A. Klauck (Milwaukee)
1989 – 1990	Georgette Bellucci (Pittsburgh Highland Drive)
1990 – 1991	Dale Cannon (Dallas)
1991 – 1992	Edmund Nightingale (Minneapolis)
1992 – 1993	Robert D. Kerns (West Haven)
1993 – 1994	Alexander Boeringa (Houston)
1994 – 1995	Christine LaGana (Baltimore)
1995 – 1996	Patrick A. Boudewyns (Augusta)
1996 – 1997	Stephen Cavicchia (Coatesville)
1997 – 1998	Robert C. Gresen (Milwaukee)
1998 – 1999	Matthew J. Blusewicz (Northern California)
1999 – 2000	Jeffrey P. Burk (North Florida/South Georgia)
2000 – 2001	Peggy J. (Cantrell) Krieshok (Kansas City)
2001 – 2002	Judith E. Patterson (Brooklyn)
2002 – 2003	Kenneth Adams (Ann Arbor)
2003 – 2004	Steve Holliday (San Antonio)

## 40-year History of AVACP/AVAPL

2004 – 2005	Terence M. Keane (Boston)
2005 – 2006	Kathleen M. McNamara (Honolulu)
2006 – 2007	Jamie Adler (Madison)
2007 – 2008	Steven Lovett (Palo Alto)
2008 – 2009	Mark Hinterthuer (Little Rock)
2009 – 2010	June Malone (San Antonio)
2010 – 2011	George Shorter (North Florida/South Georgia)
2011 – 2012	Pamela Fischer (Oklahoma City)
2012 – 2013	Mary Levenson (Bay Pines)
2013 – 2014	Jody Rubenstein (Dallas)
2014 – 2015	John McQuaid (San Francisco)
2015 – 2016	Thomas Kirchberg (Memphis)
2016 – 2017	Ronald Gironda (Tampa)
2017 – 2018	Mary Beth Shea (Orlando)

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## Summary Comments

This history describes numerous activities of the association over a 40-year period in several key areas that included promoting credentials for VA psychologists (clinical privileging and medical staff membership), protecting and enhancing the VA psychology training program, ensuring there were adequate numbers of psychology and other mental health staff to meet the treatment needs of veterans, and seeking pay and benefits for staff psychologists to recruit and retain valued senior psychology staff for the VA's patient care mission. The overarching contribution of the association, however, has been in its communication and networking role among VA psychology leaders and between VA psychology leaders and leadership in VACO, APA, veterans' service organizations, and Congress.

The association's newsletters provided the initial communication and networking step in 1978 by providing information about the troubling issues faced by chiefs. That communication also promoted a sense of community among members with similar challenges and interests. An invitation by association leaders encouraging members to become involved in association projects provided an additional outlet for members to direct their efforts toward a shared cause.

The highly successful chief's training program begun in 1983 provided a direct benefit to members by helping them learn skills needed to effectively manage programs and staff. The training not only helped psychology leaders perform their local duties but strengthened networking through interpersonal contact and led many to seek leadership roles in the association. The training interaction with psychiatry, social work, and nurse leaders in the later programs also fostered a valuable sense of interprofessional collaboration within the VA's mental health program community.

The first VA psychology leadership conference in 1998 brought new life to the community of VA psychology leaders over common woes by reminding members what they could do together working on problems and focusing on solutions. Equally important was that the conferences created a re-energized sense of community within VA psychology. Pride replaced disillusionment and disappointment, and advocacy for the profession and the care of veterans replaced inadequacy in responding to the forces interfering with the purpose and values of VA psychologists. The working-together experience and the sense of community grew and remains a leadership conference focus through the present time. VA psychology and its leaders would—

and will—still be faced with problems in the future, but the seed for discovery of ways to respond to those problems had been planted in early conferences and was nourished and sustained in succeeding conferences.

The Washington mid-winter meetings with VACO and APA officials started by Sid Cleveland in 1981 became the single most important and successful communication event of the association in talking with leadership in a larger community of those involved/interested in VA psychology and VA patient care issues. By 1986, those meetings had expanded to important contacts with veteran service organizations and Congress. The face-to-face meetings with that larger community during the mid-winter meetings provided an opportunity to educate others about VA psychology's professional and patient care concerns and demonstrated a willingness to join others in working on common goals. The communication/discussion in these meetings could never have been done as well with position papers or other written communication and became an important opportunity for introducing advocacy partnerships for the critical matters facing VA psychology over the years.

Although the AVACP/AVAPL history contains numerous accounts of assistance provided VA psychology, equally remarkable is how the association and its leaders helped the profession face struggles during difficult times that even seemed to threaten its existence. The history provides an impressive glimpse into the resilience of psychology leaders with reports involving patience, accommodation, persistence, and attention to the needs of veterans.

This current history ends with still another challenge for the VA and VA psychology with advocacy by AVAPL and other partners to prevent the privatization of VA health care for veterans. The advocacy effort is based on solid evidence showing that the VA has a demonstrated ability to provide quality mental health care for veterans beyond that being done in non-VA mental health care settings. We can look forward to reading the 50-year history of AVACP/AVAPL describing how VA psychology and AVAPL and its partners met this and other challenges during the next decade to maintain the noble cause of the VA—to serve those who placed themselves in harm's way in their service to our country. Lest readers consider this wishful thinking, this 40-year history of AVACP and AVAPL serves to support predictions for that outcome.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many footnotes to this narrative have already documented the contributions of a number of VA psychology leaders to this history in personal communication or published personal career stories, and I thank them for their accounts and information. Many other past VA psychology leaders were consulted to confirm the accuracy of events reported. Special thanks, however, are due to three individuals who provided subject matter expertise in reviewing the content of this manuscript: Philip Laughlin, Robert Gresen, and Robert Goldberg. Phil Laughlin was involved in the early formation of the association, edited its newsletter from 1978 to 1983, and served as AVACP president from 1983-1984. He remained active in association affairs until his retirement in 1997. He was asked to pay special attention to the reporting of AVACP activities in the first 20 years of this history. Bob Gresen not only served as AVAPL president from 1997-1998, but he worked with AVAPL leadership while serving as the acting deputy or acting deputy consultant for mental health in VACO from 1993-1994, 1998-2000, and 2004-2005. After his retirement in 2008, he also served as consultant to VA mental health services from 2008-2013 and continued to be an important resource to AVAPL. He was asked to give attention to the reporting of AVAPL activities for the last 20 years of this history. As current historian for AVAPL and Division 18 of APA and as a VA training director for 35 years, Bob Goldberg was asked to review the entire manuscript for attention to the inclusion and accuracy of important training event reporting and general VA psychology history themes for this history. In their reviews, all three added important comments and suggestions that added to the scope, accuracy of reporting, understanding, and accomplishments of AVACP/AVAPL and that of VA psychology and its leaders. All of the above have my thanks for contributing to this history.



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**URLs for Retrieving AVACP and AVAPL Newsletter Citations from 1978-2003**

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{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31282>}

1978 May (Vol 1, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31283>}

1978 October (Vol 1, #5)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31286>}

1979 January (Vol 2, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31372>}

1979 August (Vol 2, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31323>}

1979 November (Vol 2, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31324>}

1980 January (Vol 3, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31343>}

1980 July (Vol 3, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31345>}

1981 February (Vol 4, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31347>}

1981 May (Vol 4, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31348>}

1981 August (Vol 4, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31349>}

1981 October (Vol 4, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31350>}

1982 April (Vol 5, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31352>}

1982 October (Vol 5, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31354>}

**URLs for Retrieving AVACP and AVAPL Newsletter Citations (continued)**

1983 January (Vol 6, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31355>}

1983 April (Vol 6, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31356>}

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1983 October (Vol 7, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31368>}

1984 February (Vol 7, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31358>}

1984 May (Vol 7, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31370>}

1984 October (Vol 8, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31359>}

1985 January (Vol 8, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31360>}

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{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31362>}

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{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31363>}

1986 May (Vol 9, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31364>}

1986 August (Vol 9, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31365>}

1986 October (Vol 9, #5)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31367>}

**URLs for Retrieving AVACP and AVAPL Newsletter Citations (continued)**

1987 May (Vol 10, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31289>}

1987 November (Vol 10, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31291>}

1988 February (Vol 11, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31292>}

1988 May (Vol 11, #2)

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1989 January (Vol 12, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31296>}

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{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31297>}

1990 January (Vol 13, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31299>}

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{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31300>}

1990 June (Vol 13, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31301>}

1990 October (Vol 13, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31302>}

1991 January (Vol 14, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31303>}

1991 April (Vol 14, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31304>}

**URLs for Retrieving AVACP and AVAPL Newsletter Citations (continued)**

1992 February (Vol 15, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31307>}

1992 July (Vol 15, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31308>}

1993 January (Vol 16, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31309>}

1993 June (Vol 16, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31310>}

1993 October (Vol 16, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31311>}

1993 December (Vol 16, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31312>}

1994 March (Vol 17, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31313>}

1994 June Vol 17, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31314>}

1994 September (Vol 17, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31315>}

1994 December (Vol 17, #4)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31316>}

1995 April (Vol 18, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31317>}

1995 June (Vol 18, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31318>}

1995 October (Vol 18, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31369>}

1996 July (Vol 19, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31320>}

**URLs for Retrieving AVACP and AVAPL Newsletter Citations (continued)**

1996 October (Vol 19, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31321>}

1997 June (Vol 20, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31325>}

1997 November (Vol 20, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31326>}

1998 April (Vol 21, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31327>}

1998 September (Vol 21, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31328>}

1998 Winter (Vol 21, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31329>}

1999 Spring (Vol 22, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31293>}

1999 Summer (Vol 22, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31331>}

1999 Autumn (Vol 22, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31332>}

1999 October (Vol 22, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31371>}

1999 Winter/2000 Spring (Vol 23, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31333>}

2000 Summer (Vol 23, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31334>}

2000 Autumn (Vol 23, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31335>}

2001 Mid-Winter (Vol 24, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31336>}

**URLs for Retrieving AVACP and AVAPL Newsletter Citations (continued)**

2001 Leadership Conference Edition (Vol 24, #2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31337>}

2001 APA Edition (Vol 24, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31338>}

2002 Mid-Winter Edition (Vol 25, #1)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31339>}

2002 APA Edition (Vol 25, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31340>}

2003 Mid-Winter and Leadership Conference (Vol 26, #1 & 2)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31341>}

2003 APA Edition (Vol 26, #3)

{<http://collections.uakron.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15960coll1/id/31342>}