

# North American Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists

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Since 1978, Members and Fellows of the College have met once or twice annually at meetings of the American and Canadian Psychiatric Association. Although small in numbers, the meetings of the North American Group have served to maintain contact with the College. The College President, Immediate Past President and Registrar have attended recent meetings. There are over 500 Fellows and Members in the USA and Canada, and with increased awareness of the existence of the North American Group, which was officially recognised by the College in 1996, expansion of activities to include educational programmes is expected. For this to occur, the membership would need to respond in greater numbers than heretofore.

The first organisational meeting of the North American Society of the Royal College of Psychiatrists was held on 10 May 1978 in Atlanta, Georgia during the 131st Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The founding Chairman was Dr David Davis, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Missouri and a Fellow of the College. The Secretary was Dr Michael F. Cleary, Scottsdale, Arizona and Co-Treasurers were Professor Isaac Sakinofsky of McMaster University, Ontario and Dr Lawrence Sharpe, Columbia University, New York. A second meeting was held in October 1978, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, during the 28th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Psychiatric Association.

An initial announcement had been sent to 500 Members and Fellows, listed on the 1977 membership list of the Royal College as resident in the USA and Canada. (Remarkably, this number has remained constant over the years; a 1997 mailing was sent to 535 Members in the USA and Canada.)

In 1979, a reception and business meeting was held during the APA May meeting in Chicago. Dr Thomas Bewley, then Dean of the College, was present and was one of the participants, along with a number of Professors from the USA and Canada, on a panel on Transnational Reciprocity for Board Certification: panellists included the Executive Secretary of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and the Chairman of

the APA Council on Medical Education and Career Development. This topic and panel were clearly of great relevance to College members in both countries.

In preparation for the 1980 meeting, Dr Davis solicited ideas from the membership about possibilities of putting on a scientific programme, inviting guest speakers from the College, seeking financial aid from drug companies and formalising invitations to membership to expatriates in North America.

Meetings were held in San Francisco and Toronto in 1980, at the 1981 APA meeting in New Orleans, and at meetings in 1982 of the APA (Toronto, May) and the Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA) in Montreal. At the 1982 Toronto meeting, Professor Linford Rees and Dr John Gunn chaired a panel discussion on "Concerns of Societal Need, Recruitment and Training" with Dr John Ewing, Dr Harry Prosen, Dr Quentin Rae-Grant and Dr John Howells. This meeting immediately preceded a joint APA Royal College meeting in Dublin.

In 1984 Dr Davis stepped down from Chairmanship at the APA May meeting. Professor Isaac Sakinofsky assumed the Chair and immediately arranged a reception at the CPA meeting at Banff Springs, Alberta in October.

In 1986, Dr Thomas Bewley met with Members of the College at the CPA meeting in Vancouver, having invited all Members resident in the USA and Canada, his agenda being a review of the progress of the College in its first 15 years.

From 1984 to 1993, the fortunes and activities of the Chapter were guided successively by Professor Isaac Sakinofsky from Toronto and Dr Warren Taff of Brea, California. The format, in the USA, consisted of a reception held during the Annual Meeting of the APA. At the 1993 APA meeting in San Francisco, Dr Taff turned his duties over to me and I have remained Chair of the Chapter or Group since that time.

In 1996, I was advised by Professor Chris Thompson, Registrar of the College, that the Group had been given official recognition by the Council of the College.

## Meetings

In the past four years (1994–97) North American Group receptions, held as usual during the APA meeting, were well received, attendance ranging from 30 to 60.

The receptions, held in Philadelphia, Miami, New York and San Diego have followed a similar pattern, but have presented the problem of steadily rising cost. We have been well supported, and encouraged, by the College, in particular by Professor Sydney Brandon, who attended all of these meetings and was the official representative of the College at the 1994 meeting. The then President, Dr Caldicott, attended the 1995 Miami meeting, the College was represented by Professor Gene Paykel at New York in 1996, and the current President, Dr Robert Kendell, attended the 1997 reception in San Diego.

The overall APA meeting is organised on rigid lines; location, in one of the major hotels, and time slot, are applied for and assigned four to five months in advance. The time of day cannot conflict with programme items, or official evening events such as the Annual Convocation of Fellows. There may be dozens of other 'Component and Allied' activities held at the same time, so that once time and date are set, the schedule is fixed.

The reception gives the President, or Senior College representative, the opportunity to review the activities of the College in the past year, in a very informal and relaxed atmosphere, with North American Members. Increased awareness of, and interest in, the College meetings and Sections are an added bonus: I saw several North American colleagues at the Royal College Annual meetings at Scarborough and Torquay, and at the Joint Meeting, in London, with the Association of European Psychiatrists, in 1996.

The negative side of the Group's recent history has been the relatively low percentage or numerical response from the membership. The College has provided me with a list of those Members and Fellows whose addresses are in the USA and Canada. The numbers, as indicated above, have remained steady, 300 or so in Canada and 250 or slightly less in the USA. Response to mailings and subscription requests, to three mailings sent out in October 1994, January 1996 and January 1997, has varied; positive and negative reactions

Table 1. Response rate to mailing (by % of North American membership in US and Canada)<sup>1</sup>

	1994-95	1996	1997
USA	33%	32%	22%
Canada	18%	20%	10%

1. Actual numbers responding: 1994-95=130 (24.5%); 1996=133 (25%); 1997=86 (16%).

have been voiced, but the majority have not responded at all, as shown in Table 1.

In contrast, the expense of hosting a relatively modest function has increased each year, but it is felt that increasing the present subscription (\$US25.00, \$CDN30.00) might further diminish the response from the membership. The large convention hotels make it clear that the bigger the group and the projected attendance, the more likely they are to provide acceptable facilities and service. Minimum projected costs and estimates have been climbing.

Individual Members have been generous in their support and appreciation of the Group, as have Presidents and Senior Fellows of the College. Some concern, however, is expressed by Members, especially those in Canada who are unlikely to make the expensive trip to the APA mega-meeting. Mailing costs cut down on opportunities to maintain contact with the membership. In the past, there was a trend to alternate meetings of the Group, scheduling the annual reception at the American and Canadian Psychiatric Associations in alternate years.

The 1998 APA Annual Meeting is in Toronto in May. That might be an opportune time to review the structure and financing of the Group and the format of future meetings. Further expansion of Group activities could include educational programmes or a guest speaker; whether sponsorship of such events is likely, or possible, could influence the future of the Group. The North American Group will have completed 20 years of existence by May 1998. As it enters its third decade, it is clear that some changes in financial structure, educational activities and sources of support and interest are necessary for survival.

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