

Optimistically Looking Ahead: Closing Remarks, 4th Annual Academy Meeting

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These remarks by the incoming president of the Academy were presented at the closing ceremonies of the fourth annual scientific meeting of the American Academy of Health Behavior in Sedona, Arizona, March 3, 2004.

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These remarks come from my heart, and I hope will stimulate future discussion and action plans. It is a real honor for me to assume the presidency of the American Academy of Health Behavior. It is an enormous responsibility when one is elected by internationally renowned and respected scholars in our field. I am humbled with this honor, and I pledge that I will do my very best to work with you and the leadership of the organization in advancing the Academy and its mission and, ultimately, promoting health and well-being for our fellow citizens.

First, I would like to recognize Dr Robert McDermott for the outstanding job he did during this past year as president of our Academy. He is leaving behind big shoes to be filled. Please join me in thanking this esteemed colleague and dear friend. I wish to also recognize our previous distinguished past-presidents of the Academy, Dr Elbert D. Glover and Dr Chudley Werch. They are visionary scholars who have truly made a difference in our profession. I would like to also thank our Executive Director, Dr Terri Manning, who through her tireless efforts, is an assurance that conferences will always operate smoothly.

On behalf of the Academy, I want to welcome Dr Randy Black as our president-elect and Dr Karen Liller as our new delegate-at-large. Also, I wish to thank Dr Bill Zimmerli for being such a wonderful volunteer for the Academy. I also thank Dr John Sciacca for his gracious hospitality for the Sedona Conference. Last, but not least, I want to thank the entire Board of Directors who has gone

above and beyond the call of duty in providing superb leadership for this organization. These leaders, using their own resources, have remained loyal and have dedicated much effort to the Academy. They have given their time, expertise, and financial support, for which they should be commended.

As a result of the commitment of the founding leaders and the Board of Directors, the Academy, in a short period of time, has become an eminent national research organization in our field, and they deserve our gratitude and recognition.

This is the only national organization in our field that clearly and indisputably focuses on research. Its mission reads, "The mission of the American Academy of Health Behavior is to advance the practice of health education and health promotion through health behavior research." This is an admirable mission that recognizes research as an essential ingredient of a discipline that deserves to be recognized as a credible field of study. You are a member of an organization that in a short period of time has become a prominent national health academy in the nation. As one of the founding members of the Academy, I had a reservation when Dr Glover invited me to join him as a founding member for establishing the Academy. My reservation was "why do we need another national health behavior/education organization?" and was based on my long-held belief that our profession is too fragmented and represented by too many different organizations. As a result, the field may not have a united voice

for advocating for its mission and recognition, but soon I recognized that clearly we did not have an organization that exclusively focused on research, which is the backbone of our profession. A few years later here we are, and AAHB has been established and has drawn the best researchers in the field under its mission umbrella. Now this organization has had several successful national conferences drawing presenters from all over the country and beyond. We have the *American Journal of Health Behavior*, under the editorship of Dr Glover, which has become a premier journal in our field. Since the establishment of the Academy, every recipient of the American Association for Health Education Scholar Award has been a member of the Academy. In spite of our successes, we have many challenges ahead as enumerated below.

- Due to our short history, we have financial constraints preventing us from doing our business like other national organizations. For example, we do not have full-time or even part-time staff for the Academy. We do not have a national office, and we do not have resources to help Board Members to attend the annual AAHB meetings, etc. A stable and sound financial base should afford the Academy to have national headquarters with designated office space and at least a full-time staff. I hope this dream becomes reality within the next 5 to 7 years.

- In order for the Academy to prosper and be better recognized as a premier organization, we should have a strategic as well as tactical plan in place for generating revenue for the Academy. We may have to pursue establishment of a foundation within the next 5 to 10 years. I have appointed a committee consisting of the Treasurer and Professor Bill Zimmerli to provide leadership for fundraising activities and to explore the feasibility of this goal.

- Our Academy members should continue to lead by example. We need to continue conducting research using sound methodology (quantitative and/or qualitative) and disseminate our findings through publishing in national and international refereed journals and presenting them in local, national, or international conferences.

- The Academy should play a significant role in promoting scientific research and articulating the significance of research

so our profession can enjoy the same recognition that other well-established disciplines in the field enjoy. The Academy should also support interdisciplinary research and link with other relevant areas of inquiry. We should also be mindful of translating our research findings for practitioners so that our research findings are put to use for our ultimate purpose of health education and behavior.

- We need to partner and strengthen our link and collaboration with other national and international health organizations in promoting research in health behavior. Consequently, the Members of the Board should continue involvement with the National Coalition for Health Education so we continue to assume a major role at the table for the profession.

- We need to increase our membership. We need more members. I realize, obviously, that membership in the Academy requires commitment and a track record in research and scholarly activities, and I know you agree with me there are health educators/behavioral scientists who do meet the requirements and are not members of the Academy or have not been invited yet. I challenge each and every one of us to recruit at least 2 new members to the American Academy of Health Behavior within the next 2 years. The criteria are listed on our web page at www.AAHB.org.

- We should mentor, motivate, encourage, support, and recognize our new generation of researchers and get them involved in the life of the Academy. These new scholars are expected to carry on the Academy's torch for future generations. We have professional obligations in mentoring our graduate students and involving them in our research initiatives and grant-writing activities.

- We need to intensify our efforts in finalizing and eventually implementing our strategic plan so we will have a more proactive, prosperous, and vibrant Academy. Toward this goal, Dr Randy Black, our President-Elect, is chairing our Strategic Planning Committee and has been tasked to finalize the plan so we have a blueprint of our future before us.

- We need to continue to promote attendance at our annual conferences. We should continue scheduling our meetings in places that draw attendees. I am pleased to inform you that our next 2005 conference is set for Charleston, SC, and

will be held February 20-23. I look forward to having you all there.

In summary, there is an anonymous saying that reads “research to teaching is as sin is to confession; without the one, you have nothing to talk about in the other.” Research is the heart and soul of our profession, and this Academy is determined to promote that very notion of research. I am excited about the challenges and opportunities ahead of us and invite you to join hands with me and the

leadership of the Academy in advancing the mission. Michelangelo has said, “The great danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but it is too low and we reach it.” So, let’s aim high, think big, and dream for such an Academy that serves as a model research organization for other disciplines.

I look forward to your full participation and your assistance. Best wishes to all of you, and I look forward to seeing you in Charleston.