

APsaA Calls for Moral Leadership

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New York, NY - October 13, 2020 - With a critical election weeks away, the American Psychoanalytic Association is calling on its members to vote for candidates who uphold psychoanalytic values and demonstrate moral leadership. The Association's President and President-elect have issued the following statement to its 3,000 members:

There has never been a more critical time in modern American history that calls for psychoanalysts to stand up for their values. We are a professional association with a proud history of public statements and activism on the most pressing issues of the day. Today, that issue is one in which psychoanalysts have deep expertise: character.

Character means a combination of qualities of mind and behavior that involve a capacity to listen carefully and with an open mind, to empathize and show compassion for those less fortunate, to take action based on reflection, and to exercise sound judgment in the face of external and internal pressures. And to do all of this with a moral core, informed by a sense of humane purpose.

Psychoanalysts study character, and try to live up to these ideals in their work and in their lives. We value telling the truth - even when it is hard to bear - and acknowledging how the painful truths of the past always inform the present.

Psychoanalysts understand the importance of social as well as personal trauma, including the traumatic effects of repeatedly being told falsehoods cloaked as reality, especially by authority figures upon whom we all depend. We have seen the devastating effects of such "gaslighting" on our patients and on society.

Psychoanalysts are scientists of the mind, and science itself is currently under assault by those leaders who attack or deny scientific evidence, and who politicize medical and scientific knowledge. Denial of the risks of the coronavirus, of racial and gender inequity, of extremes of inequality, of climate change, endangers us all. Assaults on truth and science deprive us of a basic human right - the right to health, including mental health.

Psychoanalysts value caring for the emotional well-being of our patients and the public, and so we are alarmed by the burgeoning mental health crisis in America, and the stoking of fear and anger that have been fueled by a catastrophically cruel and incompetent response both to the Covid-19 pandemic and to the persistence of systemic racism and injustice.

When political leaders fail society in such a profound way, we have an obligation to speak out. No leader is perfect, and there is room for a wide range of views and approaches to addressing the challenges we face. But one thing is clear: we need moral leaders at all levels of government who are emotionally stable, who tell the truth, who place the public good over self-interest, who are healers of division rather than polarizers and spreaders of hate, and who are - in sum - of sound character.

There is a dearth of moral leadership at the highest levels of government. We urge our psychoanalytic colleagues - and all citizens - to vote on November 3rd for those candidates who they believe consistently uphold humanistic, psychoanalytic values and demonstrate moral leadership. Character matters.

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William Glover, Ph.D
President
Kerry Sulkowicz, MD
President-elect

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