



ACNP 2012 President's Letter
John H. Krystal, M.D.

At the 50th anniversary of the ACNP, times are wonderfully terrible. I refer, of course, to the remarkable convergence of the best explanatory neuroscience in history and the lack of success in using this neuroscience to develop new treatments for patients with psychiatric illnesses. This lack of success reverberates in our society. Pharmaceutical companies are pulling out of psychiatric drug development. Prominent editors, such as Dr. Marcia Angell, attack the scientific credibility of our field. Obtaining funding for research is more difficult than ever in recent history. In this darkness, our College remains a source of inspiration and support for translational neuroscience, the only conceivable path, other than dumb luck, toward new treatments.

By contrast, when our College was founded in 1961, the one thing that psychiatric neuroscience *could* do was develop radically novel impactful pharmacotherapies for psychiatric disorders including imipramine, chlorpromazine, iproniazid (MAOI), lithium, and benzodiazepines. ACNP members played critical roles in the identification and development of these treatments. At our 50th anniversary, we salute the groundbreaking contributions of these pioneers. We also wonder how these pioneers could have possibly made these advances given the science of their time. 50 years later, we are still studying these same medications, trying to identify the molecular mechanisms underlying their therapeutic effects. We can say with confidence, though, that these pioneers were not constrained by received wisdom, oppressive academic bureaucracy, or laborious industry-academia-government contracting. It is instructive to read the psychiatric journals from 1961. There was very little about the brain in these journals and even less that hinted of explanatory science. While the founders of the ACNP had no ability to understand what they were doing to the brain, had limited research funding, and no established models, their experiments were inherently exemplars of high-risk high-gain research. In baseball parlance, they swung for the fences.

Since then, the progress in psychiatric neuroscience represented within the ACNP has been astounding. We have seen many dreams about understanding the brain become reality. For example, the physician-turned-novelist Walker Percy, in his 1969 book, Love in the Ruins, foretold of a device that could non-invasively measure the activity of brain regions and then stimulate these brain regions to treat depression. We now have PET, fMRI, and MEG to measure localized brain activity and TMS and DBS to stimulate discrete brain regions. In the footsteps of the founders of the ACNP, the breakthroughs in psychiatric neuroscience continue to be exemplars of high-risk high-

PRESIDENT
 John H. Krystal, M.D.

PRESIDENT-ELECT
 David A. Lewis, M.D.

PAST PRESIDENTS
 Eric J. Nestler, M.D., Ph.D. (2011)
 David R. Rubinow, M.D. (2010)

SECRETARY
 Alan Frazer, Ph.D.

TREASURER
 David J. Kupfer, M.D.

COUNCIL
 Cindy L. Ehlers, Ph.D.
 (10-12)

Mark A. Geyer, Ph.D.
 (10-12)

Karen F. Berman, M.D.
 (11-13)

John G. Csernansky, M.D.
 (11-13)

Linda S. Brady, Ph.D.
 (12-14)

Ronald S. Duman, Ph.D.
 (12-14)

Ronnie D. Wilkins, Ed.D.
 Executive Director

ACNP EXECUTIVE OFFICE
 5034A Thoroughbred Lane
 Brentwood, TN 37027
 Tel: (615) 324-2360
 Fax: (615) 523-1715
 acnp@acnp.org
 www.acnp.org

gain research. But unlike the founders, current research is embedded in explanatory neuroscience, i.e., knowledge builds on knowledge. As we move forward, we have to abandon much of what we thought that we knew. Advances in genetics challenge our diagnostic structure, advances in pathophysiologic models challenge long-held beliefs about neurobiology, and evident limitations in the explanatory power of animal models for therapeutics portends both new preclinical approaches and a new generation of human translational research. It is evident that we are in a period of fundamental transformation in translational neuroscience. As a College that thrives on lively scientific discourse, informal debate, and innovation...what more could we ask for?

As we emerge from our 50th year, I have heard many people speculate about the core values of our College. During my term as president of the ACNP, I will focus on the imperative that our College should strive to hold itself to the “high risk-high gain” ethos of its founders, i.e., to support the research and the researchers that will make a difference...will change the *status quo*. The relative lack of progress in the treatment of psychiatric disorders is a crisis and the solution to this crisis, the emergence of new paradigms in the Kuhnian sense, cannot be simply more research following established formulae. As happened at the founding of the ACNP, we need to continue to find ways to engage the pioneers at the frontiers of research and work together to face the fundamental challenges outlined earlier. This means that our College needs to continue to develop strategies to be supportive to emerging new fields of research, the young investigators who often spearhead these new methods, and other underrepresented groups. It also means that our College may need to wrestle with the growing mismatch between the educational mandates of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology for psychiatry trainees and the conceptual and technical educational needs of people who will contribute to the establishment of a scientific foundation for the field of psychiatry and who will apply the products of this transformation to the treatment of their patients.

As I enter my presidency year, I am particularly grateful to my immediate predecessors, David Rubinow and Eric Nestler. Under their leadership, the ACNP has become simpler, more inclusive, and more transparent. Further, through the efforts of many, the College is financially secure despite progressively reducing its reliance on support from the pharmaceutical industry. I am proud that the professionalism of the ACNP, an unacknowledged component of its progress, is greater than ever. For this, I am personally grateful to Ronnie Wilkins, Sarah Timm, and the outstanding ACNP Staff. I look forward to working closely with the past presidents; our president-elect, David Lewis; our Council; the ACNP Staff; and our members to capitalize on this moment of opportunity and to make the upcoming year a successful one for the ACNP.