



BPA News

Black Psychiatrists of America, Inc.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Originally published on the BPA Listserv on November 6, 2024

Dear esteemed members of the Black Psychiatrists of America,

Initially the US presidential election results may feel disheartening, considering the rhetoric which targeted people of color and the potential threats to safety net programs disproportionately utilized by Black people. However, I urge you to remember that our work and impact extend far beyond any single political event.

As I write this, some of us are learning at the Transcultural Conference on the Motherland. We are reminded of our ancestors who survived the Middle Passage, slavery, and Jim Crow, reminding us of our innate resilience and power to overcome the obstacles thrown in our way. Our organization was built by our ancestors reacting to the need to address the unique struggles and social conditions affecting the mental

continued on next page



*BPA President
Stephen McLeod-Bryant, MD*

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The 2025 Spring Conference will be held in Atlanta, GA from April 3-6, 2025.

President's Address, cont.

health of African people in the United States and beyond. Today, our mission is more critical than ever.

1. We must strive to set aside our differences and redouble our efforts to: Advocate for equitable mental health care for our communities.
2. Continue our research and clinical work to address the psychological impacts of systemic racism and discrimination.
3. Mentor and support each other, facilitating the rise of the next generation of Black psychiatrists.
4. Educate our colleagues and the public about the specific mental health needs of people of African descent across the diaspora.

Our strength lies in our unity, our expertise, and our unwavering commitment to our patients and communities. We have overcome significant obstacles in the past, and we will continue to do so.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

This is our time to stand firm, to support one another, and be the voices of hope and healing our community needs. Let us move forward with determination and compassion, with the knowledge that our efforts make a real difference in the lives of those we serve. Together, we will continue to effect positive change in American psychiatry and in the mental health of African Americans and the country as a whole. Thank you for staying strong and staying focused. Know that your work matters now more than ever.

Harambee,
Steve



Stephen McLeod-Bryant, MD (he/him/his)
President, Black Psychiatrists of America, Inc.

Have you visited BPA's Career Center? [Click here!](#)

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2025 Spring Conference Registration is Now Open

Our theme this year is Shaping Health Equity: Fighting for Our Minds, and we are currently putting together an exciting program of events.

Conference Registration: Learn more about the 2025 Spring Conference by [visiting the official conference page](#) where you can [register](#) and [book your stay](#) at the The Starling Atlanta Midtown, Curio Collection by Hilton today. You must register for the conference and submit your hotel reservation separately.

- Early Bird Rates: December 13, 2024 - February 2, 2025
- Regular Rates: February 3, 2025 - March 2, 2025
- Late Registration Rates: March 3, 2025 - April 2, 2025
- On-Site Registration Rates: April 2, 2025 - End of Conference

Call for Papers - Poster Session: We will be hosting a session for scientific posters and late-breaking research abstracts. [Submit your application today](#) for consideration. Spots are limited.

Sponsorship: Interested in sponsoring BPA's 2025 Spring Conference? [Visit our Sponsorship Opportunities page](#) and [submit your application online](#). Still thinking about it? [Review our prospectus](#) for comprehensive details about sponsorship.

We'll see you in Atlanta!

[**REGISTER FOR THE SPRING CONFERENCE**](#)



We want to feature **YOU** in our next newsletter! Share your wins so we can celebrate you. [Submit your highlight or article](#) by April 1, 2025.



Register



Hotel

Black Psychiatrists of America

Spring Conference 2025

Shaping Health Equity: Fighting for Our Minds

April 3-6, 2025

In collaboration with the Department of
Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences,
Morehouse School of Medicine



The Starling Atlanta Midtown | 188 14th St NE, Atlanta, GA 30361

<https://blackpsychiatrists.org/bpa-spring-conference>



2025 SPRING CONFERENCE | April 3-6

Special Events for Medical Students & Trainees

blackpsychiatrists.org/bpa-spring-conference



Register Today

We invite all MD, Ph.D., MSW, MS, matriculating, medical and graduate level students, residents, attendings and professional staff interested in grants, collaborations, careers, research and industry opportunities. *Thursday-only registration is FREE for the first 50 students and trainees to register. Space is limited.*

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS April 3, 2025

Medical Student & Resident
Brunch (11:00 AM-12:00 PM)

Medical Student & Resident
Mentoring Hour (3:00 PM-4:15 PM)

Research, Industry, and Residency
Reception & Career **Speed
Networking** (4:30 PM-5:45 PM)

Research, Industry, and Residency
Poster Session (6:00 PM-7:15 PM)



The Gathering Spot

HQ 384 Northyards Blvd NW Building 100, Suite 190 Atlanta, GA 30313

American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law 2024 Charles Dike Scholarship Winner

Topaz Sampson, MD was awarded the 2024 Charles Dike Scholarship at the 55th American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL) conference held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in October 2024.

The Charles Dike Scholarship is awarded by the Diversity Committee of AAPL to an outstanding early career forensic psychiatrist to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field of forensic psychiatry.

Dr. Sampson has been a member of Black Psychiatrist of America, Inc. (BPA) since 2018. She has previously served as the member-in-training trustee and secretary of the BPA.



Topaz Sampson, MD with award namesake and 55th AAPL President Charles Dike, MD



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NEW BPA THINK-TANK

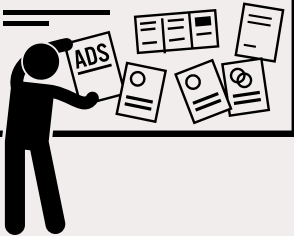
Dear Colleagues,

In light of growing inequities in mental health, education, and economic stability, we have established an ad hoc “Think Tank” within the Black Psychiatrists of America (BPA). This initiative will leverage our collective expertise to address current crises and establish a long-term vision for Black Psychiatry.

Rooted in discussions from our 2024 Transcultural Conference, this effort aims to anticipate future challenges and provide sustainable solutions to address the emotional and systemic toll on our communities. The Think Tank will not only respond to current events but also develop a proactive strategy to combat the long-term effects of systemic inequities.

We invite your participation in this transformative initiative by [clicking here to sign up](#). Your insights are vital to this process. Together, we can shape a future of equity and resilience for Black communities.

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can be changed, but nothing can
be changed until it is faced.”*
- James Baldwin

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CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS FOUNDATION PARTNERS WITH THE EQUITY BRAINTRUST TO ADVANCE MENTAL HEALTH EQUITY WITH NEW FRAMEWORK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 15, 2025

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Washington, DC — In recognition of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF) and The Equity Braintrust proudly announce the release of the National Mental Health Equity Framework, a transformative blueprint aimed at dismantling systemic

inequities in mental health care and promoting equitable access for all. Inspired by Dr. King's call to address healthcare injustice as "the most shocking and inhumane" form of inequality, this groundbreaking framework tackles critical barriers to receiving mental health care and champions actionable solutions rooted in the political and social determinants of health.

The Equity Braintrust, a coalition of advocates, policymakers, and mental health experts, developed the framework in collaboration with CBCF's Center for Policy Analysis and Research. The framework underscores the intersectionality of systemic inequities, such as racial bias, fragmented systems, and insufficient resources that disproportionately impact marginalized communities, particularly Black populations.

"Mental health is foundational to overall well-being, yet systemic inequities continue to block access to quality care for far too many communities," said **Dr. Jonathan Cox, Vice President of CBCF's Center for Policy Analysis and Research**. "Our partnership with The Equity Braintrust has been instrumental in releasing this framework, which provides a bold roadmap to ensure equitable access, cultural humility, and patient-centered approaches critical to fostering resilience and improving lives."

The framework emphasizes key priorities, including:



CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS FOUNDATION PARTNERS WITH THE EQUITY BRAINTRUST TO ADVANCE MENTAL HEALTH EQUITY WITH NEW FRAMEWORK *CONTINUED*

- **Access to Quality Care:** Addressing disparities in care navigation and transitions in care settings.
- **Workforce Development:** Expanding the mental health workforce through diversification, debt-free education initiatives, and the integration of community health workers and peer support programs.
- **Decriminalization of Mental Health:** Eliminating punitive practices and investing in community-based crisis response systems.
- **Cultural Humility and Patient Education:** Fostering trust through culturally responsive, patient-centered approaches and acknowledging the interconnectedness of physical and mental health.

“Our approach, within this framework, highlights the importance of policy reforms, community-driven solutions, and actionable strategies to transform mental health equity from an ideal into a tangible reality,” said **Courtney Billington, Chair of the Equity Braintrust**. “Achieving mental health equity requires more than addressing systemic barriers; it calls for a fundamental rethinking of care delivery.”

The National Mental Health Equity Framework also highlights the urgent need to support workforce wellness by addressing burnout, ensuring fair compensation, and fostering supportive workplace policies. By advancing policy solutions, advocacy, inclusive practices, and community-driven interventions, the framework lays a solid foundation for transformative change.

To learn more about the National Mental Health Equity Framework or access the full report, please visit <https://www.cbcfinc.org/publications>.

About CBCF: Established in 1976, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. (CBCF) is a non-partisan, nonprofit, public policy, research, and educational institute committed to advancing the global Black community by developing leaders, informing policy, and educating the public. For more information, visit cbcfinc.org and follow @CBCFinc on social platforms.

About The Equity Braintrust: The Equity Braintrust is a convening of thought leaders, advocates, and mental health experts committed to advancing equitable access to mental health care. Through informed, race-conscious policy solutions, improved care navigation, and systemic transformation, the Braintrust champions the well-being of historically marginalized communities.

My Advocacy Journey and How It helped Maryland Finally Get an Assisted Outpatient Treatment Bill Passed

My name is Dr. Cynthia Major Lewis and I am the Medical Director of Adult Psychiatric Emergency Services at Johns Hopkins.

I have had the fortune of working in various treatment settings throughout the years. I have been able to treat a diverse patient population, patients who come from all walks of life. I have come to learn that my passion lies in treating patients with severe mental illness; those who are often disenfranchised and most vulnerable. In 2019, I was asked to be embedded in the Emergency Department and Direct our Psychiatric Emergency Services at Johns Hopkins. It was then that I began to get a sense that something was broken in Maryland's mental health system.

While embedded in the emergency department, I began to notice that I would often see the same patients, several times a month and sometimes several times a week. I became increasingly alarmed when I would see these same patients back in the emergency department within months, weeks or even days of their previous presentations or hospitalizations. As I continued to watch this cycle repeat itself, I began to question, why is this happening? . I learned that Maryland was one of only three states that did not have an Assisted Outpatient Treatment or AOT Program.

I learned that these AOT programs, when managed thoughtfully and successfully, are designed to help patients with severe mental illness, who through no fault of their own and because of symptoms that are part of their clinical disease process, find themselves lacking the insight or ability to appreciate that they have an illness that is treatable. I learned that states with successful AOT programs often found rates of incarceration, ED visits, inpatient hospitalizations, homelessness, victimization and death, decreased by 70-80%. I realized that Maryland's lack of an Assisted Outpatient Treatment has led to a population of patients with severe mental illness who are falling through the cracks and dying early deaths. These patients were being denied the ability to receive lifesaving, evidence- based treatment that can help them lead safe, healthy and dignified lives.



Dr. Cynthia Major Lewis

My Advocacy Journey and How It helped Maryland Finally Get an Assisted Outpatient Treatment Bill Passed, cont.

This realization led me on my advocacy journey. I realized I could only do so much from the front lines. I joined the Maryland Psychiatric Society's Legislative Committee and found myself in Annapolis lobbying State Senators and Congressmen. I provided written and oral testimony which helped Maryland to finally pass an Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program Law, after near two decades of trying.

I was fortunate to be at the side of Maryland's first Black governor, Wes Moore, when he signed Maryland's first Assisted Outpatient Treatment Legislation into law on May 16, 2024. I knew that I could not sit back and watch my state continue to fail our patients. Representation truly mattered when it came to helping Maryland finally pass an Assisted Outpatient Treatment law.





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Coming Soon! Dr. Chester M. Pierce Documentary

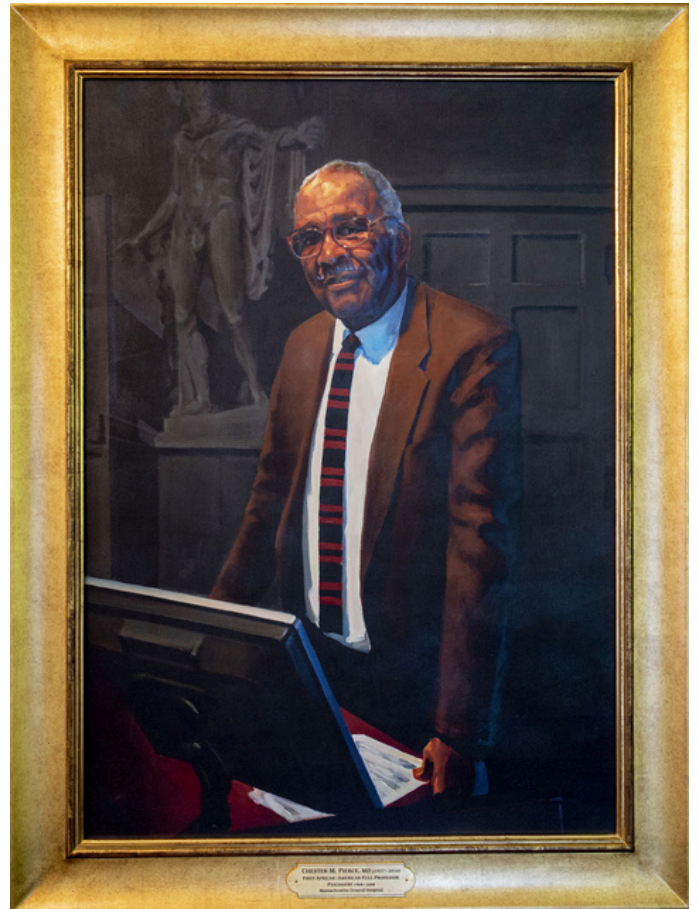
By Cynthia Turner-Graham, MD

A documentary about Dr. Chester Pierce has been in the making for several years by Butter Pecan Productions with a Summer 2025 release date. Entitled LIMITLESS: The Dr. Chester Pierce Story, it chronicles his remarkable life and the breadth and depth of his impact. A composite portrait of Dr. Pierce is created by reviewing his published papers, researching his diverse professional experiences, and interviewing key players in his life under the oversight of the documentary's producer, Gloria Repress-Churchwell. She cites, "This documentary captures the multiple spaces of Dr. Pierce's impact professionally and personally, locally and globally. His is an American story that is truly inspirational." Notably, she also authored an award-winning children's book about him entitled FOLLOW CHESTER!

In 1969, Dr. Pierce and a group of Black psychiatrists became increasingly disgruntled with "mainstream" psychiatry and its refusal to name, acknowledge, or address the realities of systemic racism in America. Under Dr. Pierce's leadership, Black Psychiatrists of America was "birthed" to fill this vacuum and address the pernicious mental health impact borne by Black and other persons of color.

We know this story well. A much larger one needs telling, however, as his life's work continues to be impactful today. For instance, Dr. Pierce's role was pivotal in creating Sesame Street and its depiction of diversity as a valuable asset in early childhood. Presenting a diverse world to children on TV stood in stark contrast to the world they occupied in 1969 when Sesame Street first aired. Largely a "gift" from Dr. Pierce, he understood the necessity to expand the developmental skill set of children in a rapidly changing world. Preparing them for global citizenship, he believed, was a prerequisite to becoming a fully functional adult.

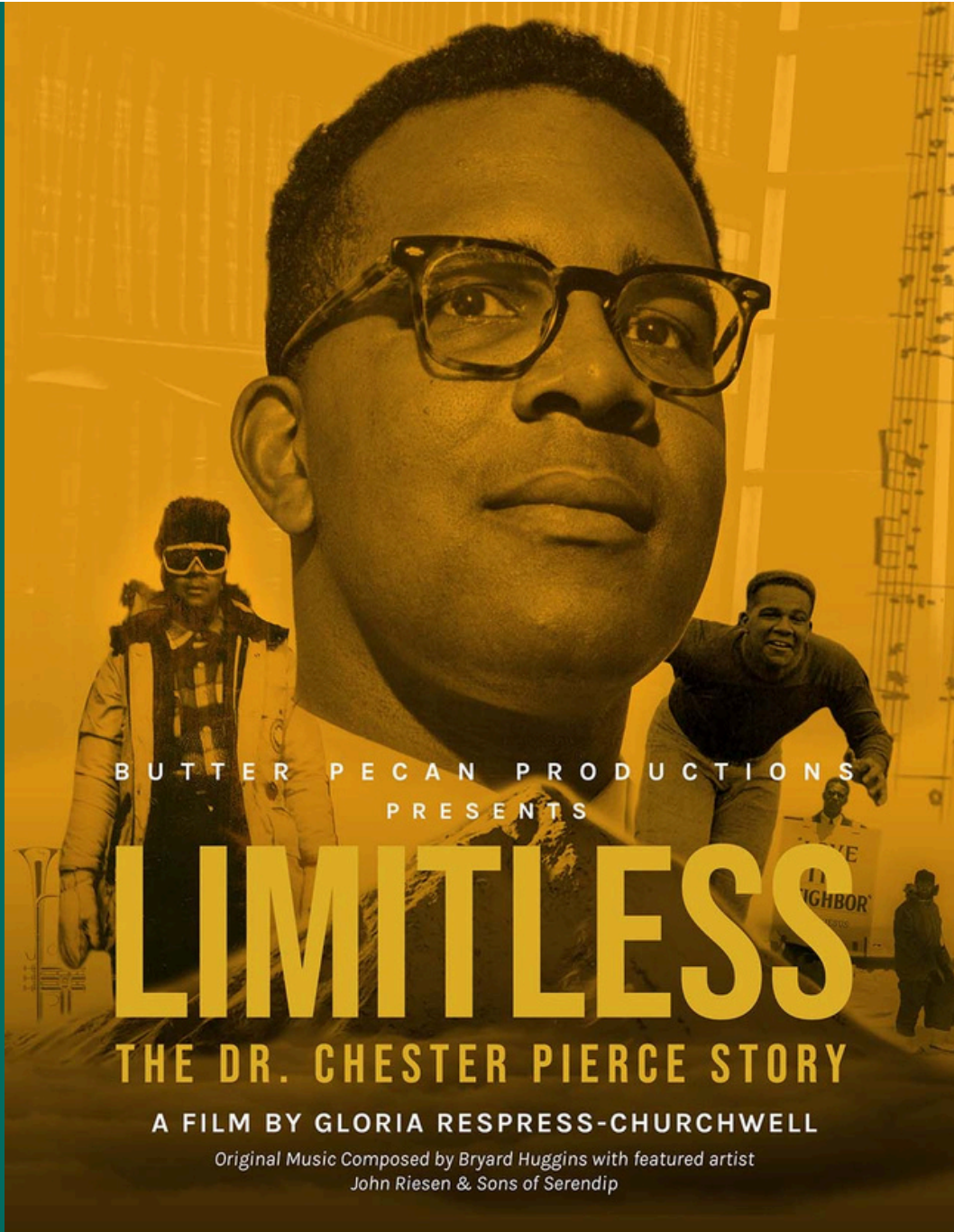
You can [view a documentary teaser here](#). It provides a glimpse into the life and work of Dr. Pierce, featuring interviews with his family, colleagues, and friends, and highlights some of the key moments in



Portrait of Chester Middlebrooks Pierce (1927-2016), Paul S. Russell MD Museum of Medical History and Innovation, Massachusetts General Hospital ©2017-2025

Coming Soon! Dr. Chester M. Pierce Documentary, cont.

his career. Feel free to share it with your colleagues, friends, and on social media. There is much to be mined from Dr. Pierce's remarkable life and legacy, for it reminds us of the power of bold vision and corresponding strategic action in challenging times.



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A Historic Gathering for Mental Health in Nairobi, Kenya

By Napoleon B. Higgins, Jr. MD

The African Global Mental Health Initiative (AGMHI) and the Black Psychiatrists of America (BPA) recently hosted back-to-back conferences in Nairobi, Kenya, marking a significant milestone in global mental health collaboration. The AGMHI conference took place from November 4-6 at the Sarova Panafric Hotel, followed closely by the BPA Transcultural Conference from November 7-10 at the Nairobi Serena Hotel, just blocks away.

With themes of "Closing the Gap: Innovations in Mental Health" for AGMHI and "The Power of Us: Collective Action for Black Mental Health Across the Diaspora" for BPA, these gatherings brought together an unprecedented assembly of Black psychiatrists and allied mental health professionals. This historic event, organized by predominantly Black organizations from the United States, attracted over 250 attendees, making it the largest known gathering of its kind overseas.

The conferences provided a unique platform for cultural exchange and professional development. Mental health professionals from Africa and the diaspora came together to learn, collaborate, and build meaningful connections. The event underscored the importance of advancing mental health care in Africa through four key domains: research, training and education, clinical care delivery, and advocacy and policy while "Lifting Minds" or the African collective on the continent and abroad.

A highlight of the BPA conference was a three-day safari to the Amboseli National Wildlife Park at the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro, which included an enriching cultural exchange with the Maasai Tribe of Kenya. This experience offered attendees a profound connection with the local culture and environment, further enriching the conference's impact.

The warmth and hospitality of the Kenyan people, combined with the shared commitment of like-minded psychiatrists from across the African diaspora, created an atmosphere of camaraderie and mutual respect. Long-lasting friendships and professional relationships were forged, paving the way for continued collaboration and success.

As we reflect on this landmark event, we look forward to future opportunities to collaborate and drive forward our shared mission. Together, we are committed to making a tangible difference in the mental health landscape for African people and the diaspora, fostering local and global change for the prosperity of Black minds.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who participated and contributed to the success of these conferences. Your dedication and passion inspire us as we continue our work to advance mental health care and advocacy across the globe.

A Historic Gathering for Mental Health in Nairobi, Kenya, cont.



Kenya Women & Children's Wellness Centre Visit



Kenya Women & Children's Wellness Centre Visit During the Transcultural Conference

Originally posted in the Kenya Women & Children's Wellness Centre newsletter [November 2024, Vol 2.5]

KWCWC was delighted to host the Black Psychiatrists of America (BPA) at our facilities, engaging in meaningful discussions on the intersection of mental health and GBV. This visit not only highlighted shared global concerns but also amplified the need for collaborative solutions to tackle the challenges of GBV.

The highlight of the day was a moving testimony from one of our GBV survivors, who courageously shared her story. She recounted her harrowing experience with GBV and her subsequent struggle to reclaim her life.

KWCWC remains dedicated to addressing GBV in all its forms, advocating for survivors, and providing holistic care that encompasses physical, emotional, and social recovery. This event reaffirms our belief that partnerships—both local and global—are essential in our fight against GBV.



SAVE THE DATE

MAY 16, 2025 | MEMPHIS, TN

PSYCHIATRIC ADVOCACY COLLABORATIVE TEAMS SUMMIT (PACTS)

Bringing the Village to the Children:
Convening the Helpers



Tami Benton, MD

- President, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- Psychiatrist-in-Chief
- Chair, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP)

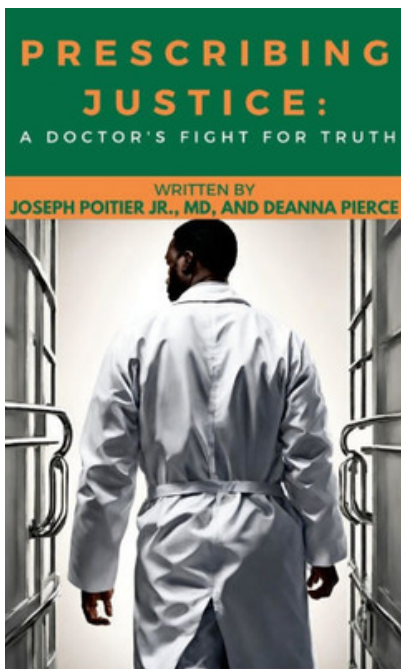
Dr. Benton will discuss the crucial role of child and adolescent psychiatrists in transforming children's mental health through collaboration with schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations; highlighting the need for an interdisciplinary, coordinated effort to serve all children.



2nd Annual Psychiatric Advocacy Collaborative Teams Summit-PACTS

AUTHOR'S CORNER

Welcome to the Author's Corner which showcases the latest and greatest from BPA's members! Here, authors can proudly present their newly published works. Whether you're a seasoned writer or a debut author, this is your space to shine. Happy reading!



Prescribing Justice: A Doctor's Fight for the Truth

by Joseph Poitier, Jr. MD and Deanna Pierce

In a world where the mind's complexities often intersect with the law, the need for expert insight and compassionate care becomes paramount. With a profound understanding of the human psyche and a meticulous approach to forensic evaluation, Dr. Joseph W. Poitier, Jr., offers a unique blend of clinical expertise and legal acumen as a distinguished forensic psychiatrist dedicated to bridging the gap between mental health and the justice system. He has teamed up with Deanna Pierce and has written a book capturing his work experience with the infamous Miami-Dade Pre-Trial Detention Center. Media outlets across the world captured the shocking conditions and treatment afforded the most vulnerable of mentally ill inmates on "The Forgotten Floor". Public outrage followed but change was painfully and for some inmates, perilously slow.