

Position Statement on Psychiatric Treatment and Sexual Orientation

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 1998
Approved by the Assembly, November 1998

"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees...These are...position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects..." – *APA Operations Manual*.

The Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the *DSM* in 1973 after reviewing the evidence that it was not a mental disorder. In 1987, ego-dystonic homosexuality was not included in the *DSM-III-R* after a similar review.

The American Psychiatric Association does not currently have a formal position statement on treatments that attempt to change a person's sexual orientation, also known as reparative or conversion therapy. There is an APA 1997 *Fact Sheet on Homosexual and Bisexual Issues* which states that there is no published scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of reparative therapy as a treatment to change one's sexual orientation.

The potential risks of reparative therapy are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient. Many patients who have undergone reparative therapy relate that they were inaccurately told that homosexuals are lonely, unhappy individuals who never achieve acceptance or satisfaction. The possibility that the person might achieve happiness

and satisfying interpersonal relationships as a gay man or lesbian is not presented, nor are alternative approaches to dealing with the effects of societal stigmatization discussed. The APA recognizes that in the course of ongoing psychiatric treatment there may be appropriate clinical indications for attempting to change sexual behaviors.

Several major professional organizations including the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers and the American Academy of Pediatrics have all made statements against reparative therapy because of concerns for the harm caused to patients. The American Psychiatric Association has already taken clear stands against discrimination, prejudice and unethical treatment on a variety of issues including discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Therefore, the American Psychiatric Association opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as reparative or conversion therapy which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that the patient should change his/her sexual homosexual orientation.

An initial version of this position statement was proposed in September 1998 by the Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues of the Council on National Affairs. It was revised and approved by the American Psychiatric Association Assembly in November 1998. The revised version was approved by the Board of Trustees in December 1998.