



PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

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Dear Fellow Members of the GW Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences:

I am honored to have been appointed by Vice President for Health Affairs, MFA CEO and Dean Barbara Bass to serve as the interim chair of the GW Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. As many of you know, I previously served in this position. Today is my first day back in the job and I am very excited to get to work.

In accepting this position, I want to thank Jim Griffith for his superb and visionary leadership of the department and for his graciousness and generosity of spirit during our transition. I am glad that he will stay fully engaged in the department as a member of the full-time faculty and I fully anticipate our successful partnership to continue in our new roles.

With the delta variant of Covid raising its ugly head and interfering with how we come together in groups, there is too much uncertainty to know when we will be able to convene as a department to celebrate Griff's chairmanship. In the meantime, to acknowledge Griff's transition, I want to share with you a portion of my remarks when I presided over Griff's induction into the Leon M. Yochelson Professorship as the chair of psychiatry in 2014. This occasion was one of the highlights of my deanship and the distribution of these remarks is meant as a heartfelt thank you to Griff and acknowledgement of his tremendous success as chair.

How special it is for me to introduce my friend and colleague Dr. James Griffith. We became colleagues in 1994 when he joined the GW psychiatry faculty and I quickly developed a deep admiration for his commitment to education, training and scholarship, as well as his creative efforts to understand and integrate the many disparate and highly complex aspects that make us human. When I became chair of psychiatry in 2000 I named him the associate chair and when I was named the interim VP and dean at the end of 2010, I recommended that he be named interim chair. In 2013 Alan Wasserman and I recommended that he be named the chair of psychiatry and Provost Lerman made the appointment.

All who know Griff, know him as an outstanding academic physician, healer and humanitarian with outstanding clinical and teaching skills, tremendous wisdom, deep personal warmth, and a total commitment to the trainees in the department.

I know of no one who has the capacity to draw easily on so many domains of understanding of the human condition. From cognitive, social, and existential neuroscience research, to neurophysiology and neurocircuitry, genomics, pharmacology, philosophy, religion,

spirituality, anthropology, sociology, the humanities and, of course, clinical medicine and psychiatry. Griff seamlessly weaves these threads with his deep southern accent reflective of his Mississippi roots into the therapeutic encounter with a patient or family and into the classroom with residents and students.

For close to two decades the GW psychiatry residency program has been the canvas for him to create something unique, nationally-recognized, and reflective of his truly remarkable talents. A curriculum that was published in the journal *Academic Psychiatry*.

With a particular interest and expertise in trauma and cross-cultural psychiatry, Dr. Griffith has provided psychiatric treatment for immigrants, refugees, and survivors of political torture. From 2000 – 2004, he served as director of training for the Kosovar Family Professional Educational Collaborative, a project to develop a family-centered mental health system in Kosovo. He has received the Human Rights Community Award from the United Nations Association of the National Capital Area, and the Margaret B. and Cyril A. Schulman Distinguished Service Award from the George Washington University Medical Center, both for the training of mental health professionals and development of mental health services for survivors of political torture in the Washington metropolitan area.

In 2002 he was the faculty inductee of the GW Chapter of Alpha Omega Alpha Medical Honor Society. In 2003, he was honored as “Psychiatrist of the Year” by the Washington Psychiatric Society. In 2007, he was nominated by the GW medical students for the American Association of Medical Colleges Humanism in Medicine Award. In 2008 he received the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences Distinguished Teacher Award and inducted into its Society of Distinguished Teachers.

He has been honored by the American Psychiatric Association for medical student and psychiatry resident education, by the Society for the Study of Culture and Psychiatry, and with induction as a Fellow into the American College of Psychiatry and the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine.

Griff is a highly productive scholar in topics ranging from neurology, family therapy, cross-cultural and global psychiatry, spirituality and religion in psychotherapy, and psychiatric education. His work in psychosomatic medicine, in particular, on demoralization and psychotherapy with medically ill patients at the bedside is widely admired in the field.

He has three books to his credit including *The Body Speaks: Therapeutic Dialogues for Mind-Body Problems*, *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy: How to Talk to People About Their Spiritual Lives* and, his most recent, *Religion that Heals, Religion that Harms: A Guide to Clinical Practice*.

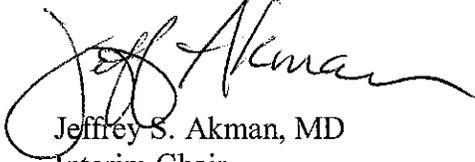
Under Griff’s leadership, the department has transitioned into terrific new and expanded space, forged an affiliation with the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis, and continues to attract and train an amazing group of residents and faculty who value the power of language to heal, the importance of social bonds and group identity, and the importance of engaging globally.

I am honored to present to you the Leon M. Yochelson Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Dr. James Griffith.

These remarks were given seven years ago. Since his installation into the Yochelson chair, Griff has accomplished an enormous amount including mentoring numerous faculty, residents and students. He has brought much acclaim to the department and has continued to be recognized by his colleagues, peers and professional organizations for his creativity, immense skills and leadership.

Please take the time to reach out to Griff and join me in thanking him for his decade of outstanding service as the chair of the GW Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

With best regards,



Jeffrey S. Akman, MD
Interim Chair