

**Building Inclusive Excellence:
American Academy of Health Behavior Presidential Note**

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I joined the American Academy of Health Behavior (AAHB) just over 10 years ago, and attended my first meeting in 2008, held that year in Oxnard, CA, a beachside enclave I consider my US hometown. It is wonderful that I found my “professional home” while at my “family home.” My involvement with AAHB was pre-destined given my doctoral advisor/mentor, Mohammad Torabi, is a founding member and former AAHB President. Through Mo, I gained other mentors – AAHB Fellows, Research Laureates, and Lifetime Achievement Award recipients – a veritable health behavior research “*Who’s Who*.” Thus, I am deeply committed to a core AAHB tenet: research excellence.

My vision is for AAHB to achieve
Inclusive Excellence.

AAHB was formed out of necessity, primarily the need to improve the “*science of health behavior research*” (McDermott & Glover, 2010). Membership criteria were deemed lofty by some. Yet, they are critical to establishing gold standards for health behavior researchers, and have led to research excellence becoming one of our hallmarks.

Is *Inclusive Excellence* an oxymoron?

Our membership criteria are meant to be exclusive, and some may consider the standards overly restrictive. I counter that *Inclusive Excellence* is the ideal. AAHB founders were dissatisfied with the quality of, and lack of emphasis and priority on, research among many of their peers.

The Academy’s recruitment, mentoring, and other activities are directed toward not only

raising the bar, but also helping others achieve excellence. Why? Because *if excellence is achieved by all health behavior researchers, we will see transformative impacts. A rising tide lifts all boats*. The importance of what we do matters now more than ever. Thus, while I am confident that we are actively working on the “inclusive” part, my charge for this year is to empirically establish the “excellence” part.

Impact Evaluation. During my presidency, I aim to conduct an impact evaluation of AAHB. This activity will determine the next steps in our journey to raise the bar AND help others achieve high standards. I know how this organization has changed the field for the better. I am among kindred spirits because we ask to see the evidence when presented with claims. *This is the missing piece for AAHB* – the evidence that will demonstrate unequivocally that who we are and what we do matters. As an organization committed to systematic and rigorous research methods, it would be hypocritical if we did not conduct a self-study.

Best Laid Plans . . .

I did not anticipate how COVID-19 would impact this nation, in part because of my personal cultural bias and personal experiences growing up in Japan. I did not expect the global and intense reaction to the murder of George Floyd, based on my experiences here in the United States, where black men are killed but the outrage never lasts. For a while, I felt overwhelmed from fighting on multiple fronts as: (a) a public health professional battling COVID-19, (b) a person of Asian heritage, battling to protect my family from anti-Asian sentiments, and (c) a black woman coping with . . . well, everything. I was

experiencing the effects of “intersectionality” and found my usual coping strategies to be ineffective.

継続は力なり

Keizoku wa chikara nari

Continuance (also) is power/strength.

In plain English, perseverance is power.

七転び八起き

Nana korobi ya oki

Fall seven times, rise eight

These Japanese proverbs are meaningful to me personally. They also reflect how I view the Academy. We are here to stay. I will spend this coming year in my position actively working inclusively – with everyone – to ensure we emerge from these challenging times stronger, like fine steel tempered by fire. As this task is not meant to be accomplished alone, I am reassured by the knowledge that the Academy can count on its people to work in concert.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the Original 33 (founding and charter members) for establishing AAHB and nurturing its growth. To my presidential predecessors, and past and present board members, and all members, I owe each of you my deepest gratitude for your contributions

to date, and those I know you will continue to make.

Meanwhile, I look forward to serving the Academy during what will be an atypical term. While I prefer to see and connect with members in person, it is not prudent to do so for the upcoming year and the 2021 Annual Meeting. Nevertheless, it will be an exciting challenge to try new approaches in delivering the sessions. The theme for 2021 (carried over from 2020) is “*Transforming the Narrative to Meet Emerging Health Behavior Challenges.*” The timeliness and relevance render it a silver-lining for the Napa meeting cancellation. Thus, the delivery may be different, but without any compromise on the quality of the science. It is who we are.

We will interface during virtual presentations in the upcoming year. Until we meet again, please stay safe and healthy!

Thank you for this opportunity to serve.



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