

DR FERAS A. AL-AWAD (SAUDI ARABIA)
STATEMENT
WPA ZONE 12 NOMINATION

I am seeking the opportunity to serve as WPA Zonal Representative for Zone 12 because I believe our region has much greater potential for meaningful collaboration than what we currently see. Zone 12 includes countries with very different resources, training systems, and mental health realities, yet many of our challenges are shared. We face common issues in stigma, access to care, workforce development, research capacity, addiction, trauma, and the mental health needs of vulnerable groups. I believe I can help bring these societies into a more connected, practical, and active regional network.

My professional background has prepared me well for this role. I currently serve as President of the Saudi Psychiatric Association, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, and Consultant Psychiatrist at King Fahad Hospital of the University. I completed my psychiatry residency in the United States at West Virginia University and fellowship training in geriatric psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. I have also worked in residency leadership, accreditation, curriculum development, public mental health initiatives, and national policy-related committees. This combination has allowed me to understand both the realities of our region and the value of structured systems, high training standards, and international collaboration.

If elected, my first priority would be to develop a digital platform that can connect psychiatric societies across the zone in a practical way. I do not want communication to depend only on congresses, occasional emails, or personal contacts. I would like to create a shared regional space for communication, exchange of educational material, webinars, mentorship, and collaborative discussion. This would allow smaller or less-resourced societies to remain connected and engaged throughout the year, rather than relying only on formal meetings or occasional contact. I believe I can contribute in a practical way here because, in less than one year, I have already led the development and implementation of the Saudi Psychiatric Association's digital presence, centered on spa.org.sa, and continue to expand it as a platform for communication, education, and organizational activity. This experience has shown me that a regional digital network is realistic, achievable, and sustainable.

My second priority would be to strengthen research collaboration. Many countries in our region are working on similar problems, but too often in isolation. I would like to encourage multicenter projects, regional surveys, and shared academic priorities. Saudi Arabia now has a more mature healthcare system and residency training structure than some neighboring countries, and I believe I can help share these experiences in a respectful and collaborative way. My goal would not be to export one country's model, but to build practical bridges that help others adapt useful approaches within their own contexts.

A third priority for me is inequity and the mental health needs of vulnerable or marginalized groups. In our region, some issues are socially and culturally sensitive and should not be approached in a simplistic or confrontational way. At the same time, psychiatrists should not avoid difficult topics simply because they are uncomfortable. I would support thoughtful

professional dialogue around stigma, minority groups, refugees, displaced populations, survivors of violence, and others who face barriers to care. In areas such as sexual and gender diversity, where attitudes in Arab and Muslim societies can be especially sensitive, I believe a realistic first step is to explore practitioner attitudes, identify training gaps, and encourage careful discussion through WPA-linked forums or position papers.

My fourth priority would be workforce and training development. I have worked closely in residency training, curriculum development, and accreditation, including applying Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada standards within our psychiatry residency program. I believe I can help support faculty development, training quality, and educational exchange across the zone.

I would approach this position as a collaborator, connector, and builder. My goal is to help Zone 12 become more connected, more academically active, and more useful to its member societies through realistic, respectful, and practical initiatives.

Sincerely,
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