Imagine that you have been recruited by a rural clinic in a neighboring state as a newly graduated child and adolescent psychiatrist. You are leaving a group of 25 fellow trainees and attending psychiatrists to become one of three child and adolescent psychiatrists serving a population of 500,000. You are able to remain in contact with many colleagues from your training program by e-mail, but you gradually realize that the challenges you are facing in your first position are very different from those of your classmates who stayed in the urban area surrounding the medical school. Your mentors from child and adolescent psychiatry residency have always been very supportive, but have little practical advice to offer for the community setting in which you practice. You would have liked to attend the AACAP Annual Meeting in October, but your more senior colleagues submitted their time-off requests months before you began your job, and you had to cover for both of them during the week of the annual meeting. Where do you turn for help?

One source of support for early career psychiatrists (ECPs) is your AACAP Regional Organization. Regional Organizations form AACAP's local network, and part of their mission is to provide education and mentorship to those in the early years of practice. Though programming on the national level may certainly be helpful for ECPs, it is the Regional Organizations that are in the prime position to help ECPs connect to sources of professional support during that critical transition from training to practice. Unfortunately, ECPs do not always know how to find their Regional Organization. The ECPs who find their regional organization and attend a meeting may find that their particular concerns as newly minted child and adolescent psychiatrists are not always addressed.

Examination of AACAP membership records in 2009 found that a significant percentage of resident AACAP members do not continue their membership in the organization after leaving training. ECPs have noted that as their time becomes more scarce and as AACAP membership dues increase in the transition from resident to full member status, they are forced to reassess the value of participation in AACAP.

In efforts to bridge these obstacles, AACAP’s Early Career Psychiatry Committee has partnered with the Assembly of Regional Organizations of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Campaign for America’s Kids to create “ECP Connect”—a program offering small grant support to Regional Organizations who are seeking to involve the ECPs in their area. The ECP Connect Award offers a chance for up to 15 Regional Organizations to sponsor educational and networking events for ECPs in their regions. The award provides up to $2,000 for Regional Organizations to hold an event or series of events for ECPs in 2011. The goals and objectives of this program are:

- To connect ECPs with their Regional Organizations.
- To offer professional support to ECPs.
- To assist and encourage ECPs to find mentors outside of their training programs.
- To identify unmet needs of ECPs and evaluate how AACAP and Regional Organizations can better meet their needs.
- To reduce isolation of ECP in their regions, especially in rural or underserved areas.
- To increase the AACAP membership numbers and increase AACAP involvement among ECPs.

It is the Early Career Psychiatrist Committee’s hope that this spotlight on ECP activities at the local level will help to attract and inspire the next generation of organizational leaders in child and adolescent psychiatry. Please be a part of your region’s efforts to reach out and connect to ECPs.

The ECP Connect Program will disburse the grants to two cohorts of Regional Organizations in 2011. The deadline for the first cohort is March 1, 2011. For more information on the ECP Connect program, please contact the AACAP Department of Research, Training, and Education at training@aacap.org or 202.966.7300, ext. 117.

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