

Dr. Angelos Halaris of Loyola Stritch elected immunology and psychiatry section chair



MAYWOOD, Ill. – Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine professor Angelos Halaris, MD, PhD, has been elected chair of the Immunology and Psychiatry Section of the World Psychiatric Association.

During a three-year, renewable term, Dr. Halaris will oversee the organization and implementation of worldwide programs to increase awareness immunology and psychiatry among psychiatrists and other mental health professionals immunology and psychiatry.

The immune system and the central nervous system interact and influence each other in health and disease. For example, 40 to 60 percent of heart disease patients suffer clinical depression and 30 to 50 percent of patients who suffer clinical depression are at risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Halaris has proposed a new subspecialty to diagnose and treat patients who suffer both depression and heart disease. He's calling it "psychocardiology."

Stress is the key to understanding the association between depression and heart disease. Stress can lead to depression, and depression, in turn, is a major stress factor. The body's immune system fights stress as it would fight a disease or infection. In response to stress, the immune system produces proteins called cytokines, including various interleukins. Initially, this inflammatory response protects against stress. But over time, a chronic inflammatory response can lead to arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), cardiovascular disease and cerebrovascular disease, which can cause heart attacks and strokes.

During a recent meeting of the World Psychiatric Association Thematic Conference on Intersectional Collaboration, Dr. Halaris was awarded the Athenian Prize for Outstanding Contributions to Psychiatry and Related Sciences. This award was in recognition of Dr. Halaris' efforts over many years to enhance collaboration between mental health professionals and medical specialists, especially neurologists, obstetricians and cardiologists.

Dr. Halaris is a professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences at Stritch.

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