



Disability and Abuse Project Disability and Guardianship Project

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February 14, 2020

Sharon J. Krinsky-McHale, Ph.D.
Awards Committee Chairperson
APA Division 33

Re: Nomination for Edward A. Doll Award

Dear Dr. Krinsky-McHale and Committee Members,

I am writing to nominate Nora J. Baladerian, Ph.D. for the Edgar A. Doll Award. It would be appropriate for Division 33 to recognize Dr. Baladerian for her decades-long career throughout which she has made substantial contributions to the understanding of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the issues affecting them.

Dr. Baladerian is a clinical and forensic psychologist who has been providing therapy to children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities as a licensed psychologist since 1988 and as a licensed marriage and family therapist since 1984. She gained her first experience with individuals with I/DD when she began working at the Harbor Regional Center for Developmental Disabilities in 1973. Dr. Baladerian is approaching the 47th anniversary of her introduction to the world of developmental disabilities. As you will learn from this letter of nomination, throughout those decades of service she has made substantial contributions to help others gain a better understanding of this population and their needs.

I have been privileged to be a friend and colleague of Dr. Baladerian for 40 years. I met her in 1980 when she was appointed by Governor Jerry Brown to serve as a member of the Governor's Commission on Personal Privacy. I was the executive director of the commission. Over the course of two years studying privacy issues affecting various segments of society, Dr. Baladerian continually educated her colleagues on the commission regarding personal privacy concerns of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She shared with us her passionate concern for this population and issues that confronted them in society.

One issue that caught commissioners by surprise was that of "deeming" – a federal marriage penalty that prevented many adults with developmental disabilities from getting married. If they were to marry, the income of one spouse would be "deemed" available to the other and, as a result, a lower-income individual who married someone with greater means could lose his or her federal benefits because they no longer met the required low-income criteria. As a result, many people with significant disabilities who could not survive without federal benefits were effectively precluded from marrying. This economic disincentive to marrying was a real eye-opener to commissioners. We recommended that the process of "deeming" should be eliminated by the federal government since it undermined the fundamental right of privacy of people with disabilities by precluding them from exercising their right to marry.

As I watched and listened to Dr. Baladerian in action during the following decades, I personally became educated about other needs and concerns of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her passion for I/DD issues in general, and of abuse of people with I/DD in particular, were contagious. For example, in 2012 when Dr. Baladerian and her colleague Jim Stream, executive director of The Arc of Riverside, launched a national survey on disability and abuse, I offered to write the first report to examine the results of the survey to which more than 7,200 people responded. This report focused on the responses of individuals with disabilities and their families, many of whom were people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Released in 2013, "The First Report: Victims and Their Families Speak Out," has been cited by many educators, advocates, and researchers. The survey and the report have helped stimulate conversations throughout the nation about the serious problem of abuse of people with disabilities, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This would not have occurred without Dr. Baladerian's leadership and tenacity.

Dr. Baladerian's passion for I/DD issues has had another major effect on me. Having devoted nearly four decades of my legal career to various aspects of civil rights advocacy for a variety of causes, I eventually decided to dedicate the remainder of my years to promoting access to justice for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who become entangled in guardianship and conservatorship proceedings. With Dr. Baladerian's support and encouragement, for the past several years I have been operating a Disability and Guardianship Project focused on the civil rights of this vulnerable population. The project is having a national impact that will benefit people with intellectual and developmental disabilities for decades to come. My dedication to this cause is a direct result of my association with Dr. Baladerian and the inspiration she provides to others.

I am sure that I am only one of many people who, because of the example and encouragement provided by Dr. Baladerian, are working today on I/DD issues and, as a result, are causing a rippling effect throughout society to improve the understanding of this population.

Now that I have shared my own personal testimony, I would like to offer examples of how her leadership has had a positive effect on people in many segments of society. However, before I do so, I would first like to discuss how for several decades Dr. Baladerian has made it a practice to continually improve her own understanding of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the issues affecting them.

Self-Education

Dr. Baladerian had her first professional interactions with individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities during her time as an employee of the Harbor Regional Center in the early 1970s. She immersed herself in the literature and classes that were available then, which wasn't much at the time. She was determined to learn all she could on the subject of I/DD. Because of the scarcity of academic material on the subject, most of her self-education at that time came from her direct experiences with regional center clients and their families. As a result, her foundation in I/DD issues was grounded in the real life experiences of this population rather than merely on books and lectures. The academic aspect of her understanding of I/DD would come later and would eventually complement her practical experience. This hybrid academic/practical approach informs her writings, lectures, and therapy sessions to this day. As you can see from the résumé and curriculum vitae on her professional website (<https://norabaladerian.com/>), Dr. Baladerian has been both a teacher and student of I/DD throughout the several decades following her early days at Harbor Regional Center.

People with I/DD

Over the course of the last few decades, Dr. Baladerian has been helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have a better understanding of themselves, the nature and extent of their disabilities, and most importantly, the wide range of abilities they also have. Through educational venues as well as therapy sessions, she has helped multitudes of children and adults with developmental disabilities. In a therapy session, for example, she sometimes must respond to their questions about why they have a particular disability. The goal of a therapy session is not just to help them feel better or treat a particular mental health condition, but to help them understand themselves and their world in which they live. When she is conducting an educational seminar for people with I/DD – whether it is about how to reduce the risk of abuse or focused on how to manage their sexual desires in a responsible manner – Dr. Baladerian also helps her I/DD audience have a better understanding of themselves so they can successfully navigate through what often seems to them as a minefield of difficult challenges. Over the years, countless numbers of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities have gained a better practical understanding of I/DD because of their interactions with Dr. Baladerian.

Parents and Families

Throughout her career – first as a regional center employee, then at a private special education school, and then as a mental health professional, Dr. Baladerian has worked with vast numbers of parents and families of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In each of these capacities, she has used empathy, compassion, and concern as she has helped them gain a better understanding of their loved ones. As a result of her ability to listen and formulate effective educational and therapeutic interactions, these parents and family members have been able to better understand the dynamics of intellectual and developmental disabilities and, as a result, have developed more loving and supportive relationships with their sons, daughters, siblings, and relatives. Regional centers in California have enlisted Dr. Baladerian to help parents and relatives of their clients deal with issues that other professionals have avoided. One such topic has been to help parents acknowledge that their children have sexual feelings and teaching them how those feelings can be expressed in a responsible manner. Another challenging topic that many parents and relatives have not wanted to face is the reality that a loved one may someday become a victim of abuse.

In addition to direct education and counseling of parents and families on I/DD issues, Dr. Baladerian has published a variety of guidebooks to assist them in dealing with some of the more challenging topics, such as sexuality and abuse. She co-authored a book with a young man with a developmental disability titled “The Rules of Sex for Those Who Have Never Been Told.” This book has been used by many parents as a tool to have productive conversations with their children about sex. She also developed a Spanish-language version of the book. Dr. Baladerian also developed a series of books for survivors of abuse. One volume of the series was specifically written for parents. More recently, Dr. Baladerian produced a guidebook for parents that provides concrete suggestions on steps they can take to reduce the risk of their child becoming a victim of abuse. She commissioned the production of a Spanish-language version of this book.

Dr. Baladerian’s educational outreach activities have helped parents in various minority communities. Two years ago she made a presentation to a Vietnamese Parent’s Group in Garden

Grove, California on “Developmental Sexuality of Individuals with I/DD.” Three years ago she made a presentation in Los Angeles to the Little Tokyo Parents Group on “Sexuality and Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.” This two-hour lecture was simultaneously translated into Japanese for the benefit of her audience. That same year she delivered a webinar in Spanish for a Parents Helping Parents group on “How to Reduce the Risk of Abuse” for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This program was recorded and made available to PHP family and staff members. She has also presented at Fiesta Educativa in Los Angeles on “Sex: Children and Adults with Developmental Disabilities” (“La Sexualidad de Niños y Adultos con Descapacidades de Desarrollo”). An Ethiopian Parents Group in Los Angeles heard Dr. Baladerian speak on “Addressing the Sexuality of Children with Developmental Disabilities.”

Service Providers

Dr. Baladerian has made many educational presentations to groups of services providers over the years on a variety of I/DD issues. She has also published guidebooks for service providers on the issue of abuse. In addition, she has helped businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government entities that provide services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities become “abuse aware agencies” by updating their policies and adopting best practices to reduce the risk of their service recipients becoming victims of abuse.

Dr. Baladerian’s risk reduction guidebook for parents and service providers has received some very positive reviews. Steve Wiseman, Executive Director of the West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council had this to say: “I expect the use of this Workbook will help countless people with developmental disabilities be safer from would-be perpetrators while developing healthier views of sex and their own sexuality.” And this from Paul Feuerstein, founder of Barrier Free Living: “Risk Reduction offers sage advice about what we can do as parents and professionals to reduce the risks associated with the sexual assault of our most vulnerable people. This is a manual that should be required reading for every parent, educator and disability professional that works with people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.”

The Mentor Network is a national health and human services provider. With offices in many states, the organization offers a continuum of services to meet the specialized needs of young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A few years ago, Dr. Baladerian traveled to several of those states to assist regional divisions of Mentor to become abuse aware agencies. In California, she worked with a nonprofit service provider known as S.T.E.P. (Strategies to Empower People) to do the same. As a result of these providers having a better understanding of the dynamics of abuse and methods for risk reduction, thousands of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are safer today.

Similar risk-reduction presentations have been made to many other service providers throughout the nation, such as the Delaware Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, AWS/Benchmark, and the National Association of Directors of Developmental Services.

Mental Health Professionals

Throughout her career as a mental health professional, Dr. Baladerian has made presentations to her colleagues to help them better understand how to provide counseling and therapy to clients with

intellectual and developmental disabilities. One of the more recent presentations – “Trauma Treatment with Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities” – was held at William James College in Boston. This two-day program provided foundational information to therapists about individuals with developmental disabilities and how the nature of their disabilities requires adaptation by the therapist in service delivery. Her most recent publishing contribution to therapy professionals is found in Chapter 17 of “Medical Response to Child Sexual Abuse” which was published in 2019 by STM Learning Inc. (edited by Dr. Randy Alexander and Dr. Nancy S. Harper).

Dr. Baladerian has written numerous articles for professional journals and associations to help psychologists and other mental health providers provide appropriate and effective therapy services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For example, APA Division 56 on Trauma Psychology has one of her presentations available on its “Web-Based Trauma Psychology Resources.” This presentation is titled “Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.”

Among the many conference presentations on I/DD issues for mental health professionals is one she did two years ago to the Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology.

Her efforts to educate mental health professionals have not been limited to the United States. Two years ago she made presentations on various aspects of I/DD during a three-day training at the psychology department of Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia in Madrid, Spain. That same year she presented on I/DD and abuse at the World Congress on Adult Guardianship in South Korea. Three years ago she did a one-day training for the Association of Psychologists in Amsterdam on “How to Reduce the Risk of Abuse for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities.”

Medical Professionals

Over the years, Dr. Baladerian has made presentations to and consulted with a variety of medical professionals, including doctors and nurses. The impact she has had on these professionals is best epitomized by a review from a forensic nurse in Louisiana who stated: “After seeing her present for the first time, my perspective on addressing the needs of people with disabilities completely changed forever. She provides high-quality, dynamic, humorous, compassionate and poignant perspectives from her years of experience working with the needs of people with disabilities. Her workbooks are helpful, her wisdom is tremendous and she has become my mentor in understanding the world of people with disabilities. Her work in compassion fatigue and understanding how to care for the caregiver is insightful and powerfully helpful.”

Dr. Baladerian has developed a “Rule Out Abuse” campaign designed to encourage physicians to consider the possibility of abuse as they assess clients with I/DD to determine the causes of adverse medical and mental health conditions. In 2016 she made a presentation on this topic to a regional Developmental Pediatrics Committee at Kaiser Permanente in Pasadena, California.

Among the many trainings she has conducted for medical professionals is one on “Forensic Interviewing Skills to Use with Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities” at a conference sponsored by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services in 2016.

On many occasions, Dr. Baladerian has made presentations and sponsored poster sessions at the

meetings of the American Association on Developmental Medicine and Dentistry.

Law Enforcement

To assist prosecutors and victim-witness personnel to more effectively do their jobs, Dr. Baladerian worked with the Office for Victims of Crime to develop a video titled “Victims with Disabilities: The Forensic Interview - Techniques for Interviewing Victims with Communication and/or Cognitive Disabilities.” The video and discussion guide, released by the United States Department of Justice in 2007, provide a specific set of guidelines for law enforcement officers, prosecutors, victim advocates, forensic interviewers, and others for interviewing adults and children with communication and/or cognitive disabilities.

Several years ago, Dr. Baladerian spoke on “Crimes Against Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Improving Prosecution, First Response, and Communication with Victims,” at a symposium sponsored by the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office. She made a presentation on victims/survivors with I/DD at a training conference sponsored by the Delaware Attorney General’s Office. She made a similar presentation at a conference sponsored by the Ohio Attorney General’s Office.

Victim/witness professionals have gained valuable knowledge about individuals with I/DD from Dr. Baladerian’s presentations at various venues over the years. One example is her presentation in 2014 on “How to Conduct the Child Forensic Interview with Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities” at a symposium sponsored by the National Child Advocacy Center Symposium in Huntsville, Alabama.

When this report was released in 2013, Dr. Baladerian made a presentation on “Findings and Recommendations of the First Report on the 2012 National Survey on Abuse of People with Disabilities” at the annual conference of the National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) in Phoenix, Arizona.

First Responders

Dr. Baladerian’s writings and speaking engagements have also been directed at first responders to emergencies – paramedics, police, and fire fighters – to give them a better understanding of how to interact with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in emergency situations.

For example, she spoke on the topics of “Child Abuse Victims with Disabilities: First Responder and Multidisciplinary Training,” and “Child Abuse Victims with Developmental Disabilities: The Forensic Interview” at a symposium sponsored by the National Child Advocacy Centers Symposium on Child Abuse in Huntsville, Alabama.

Under the direction of Dr. Baladerian, the United States Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, produced a video and trainer’s guide which were released in 2009 titled “Victims with Disabilities: Collaborative, Multidisciplinary First Response.” These educational materials not only provide guidelines for interacting with adult and adolescent victims of crime who have communication and/or intellectual disabilities, but are also helping law enforcement personnel gain a deeper understanding of the lives, personal attributes, and abilities of individuals with disabilities.

Protective Service Agencies

For some 30 years, Dr. Baladerian has worked with adult protective service agencies to assist them in gaining a better understanding of seniors and dependent adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Dr. Baladerian presented on I/DD interviewing methods at the Fifth National Adult Protective Services Conference in San Antonio, Texas in 1990. The following year, she did a full day training seminar for APS (Adult Protective Services) staff on interviewing and intervention techniques for individuals with I/DD. That same year she also did a similar training for APS workers in Kentucky. The following year she presented on I/DD issues at a statewide APS conference in South Dakota. A few years later she made an I/DD presentation at the national conference of NAPSA (National Association of Adult Protective Service Agencies). During the years that followed, she has made many presentations on a variety of I/DD issues to APS workers in various parts of the nation.

Child protective service workers have also gained a better understanding of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and how to engage with them in the course of CPS investigations, as a result of Dr. Baladerian's educational activities. Her outreach began as early as 1990 when she spoke to the leadership of the National Committee on the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Chicago on "California's efforts in the identification, prevention and treatment of developmentally disabled victims of abuse."

Throughout the years, she has educated CPS workers on I/DD issues at more than a dozen conferences sponsored by the National Resource Center on Child Abuse in Huntsville, Alabama.

Government Agencies

In addition to APS, CPS, law enforcement agencies, and first responders, Dr. Baladerian's educational activities have enlightened personnel at other government agencies on I/DD issues.

From the federal level where she educated staff at the Centers for Disease Control and the National Association of State Units on Aging, to the state level where she educated staff of the Department of Health and Human Services in Montana, to the local level where she made presentations to various school districts, scores of government employees have a better understanding of I/DD issues as a result of Dr. Baladerian's educational activities.

Legal Profession

Dr. Baladerian has been educating lawyers about clients and witnesses with intellectual and developmental disabilities for many years. She has provided trainings for prosecutors about processing cases with witnesses or victims with I/DD. She has been consulted by prosecutors when the capacity of victims is an issue. Dr. Baladerian has also served as an expert witness for public defenders who sought her expertise to assist the court in understanding various complexities of I/DD. She has also served as an expert helping civil litigators seeking damages for abuse victims with I/DD by evaluating clients for the psychological damage they have suffered as a result of abuse they experienced. Her participation helped these lawyers represent their clients more effectively.

Media

Over the years, the media has reached out to Dr. Baladerian for her insights into I/DD issues relevant to stories they were developing for newspapers and magazines as well as radio and television broadcasts. Because they chose to incorporate her expertise into their media products, millions of readers, listeners, and viewers have a better understanding of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their concerns.

Some examples of Dr. Baladerian’s media interactions include: A live talk show in 2015 on National Public Radio in Columbus, Ohio on “Sexual Abuse of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.” Two years later, a seasoned and respected NPR reporter used Dr. Baladerian’s services to develop an 8-part series on sexual abuse of people with I/DD. The series was aired in 2018.

One segment of the NPR series began: “Nora Baladerian and Karyn Harvey are both psychologists with an unusual specialty — they are among a small number of therapists who treat people with intellectual disabilities who have been the victims of sexual violence.” The series was widely acclaimed. It was heard by tens of thousands of listeners throughout the nation. As a result, the public has a better understanding of the victimization of this vulnerable population and the toll that such victimization has on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

CONCLUSION

Anyone who reviews Dr. Baladerian’s lengthy curriculum vitae will see that the descriptions of the activities mentioned above are truly the tip of an iceberg of a decades-long career devoted to promoting a better understanding of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the issues they face in a society where education on these issues is sorely needed.

Because Dr. Baladerian has devoted her professional life to providing this education to a wide range of individuals, organizations, and agencies – and has done so quite successfully – it would be most appropriate and fitting for APA Division 33 to present her with the Edward A. Doll Award this year.

I am pleased to nominate my esteemed colleague for this award. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if you need further information.

Very truly yours,



Thomas F. Coleman
Legal Director
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p.s. Information about Dr. Baladerian’s professional practice: <https://norabaladerian.com/>
Information about her nonprofit activities: <https://disabilityandabuse.org>.