Introduction to the special issue on evidence-based advocacy and strategic science in eating disorders

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Professional organizations and advocacy groups around the globe have issued a “call to arms” about the burden of suffering from eating disorders. These groups have highlighted the unmet treatment needs of afflicted individuals and have urged professionals and policy makers to marshal the resources and policy changes needed to prevent and treat eating disorders and related conditions. As an example, an international group of advocacy and professional organizations recently launched a media campaign entitled “The Nine Truths about Eating Disorders” (Academy for Eating Disorders, 2015) in an effort to educate the public about the seriousness of eating disorders and to dispel common myths and stereotypes that are barriers to effectively addressing eating disorders at the individual level (e.g., an individual experiencing eating problems may not seek help), family level (e.g., parents may fear that they will be blamed for their child’s problem), and societal level (e.g., policy makers may not consider eating disorders to be preventable or treatable and, therefore, not allocate adequate resources). The advocacy message is that reducing the burden of suffering will require changing people’s hearts and minds about eating disorders and allocating greater resources for their prevention and treatment.

But what should we advocate for? As a scientific journal in the field, the International Journal of Eating Disorders (IJED) publishes the evidence needed to advance the cause of reducing the burden of suffering. This Special Issue seeks to highlight strategic science—that is, research designed to answer important and timely policy-related questions in the eating disorders field that will allow for optimal allocation of scarce advocacy and treatment resources (Brownell & Roberto, 2015). In line with these aims, the current Special Issue includes papers relevant to three broad topic areas—reducing stigma, enhancing access to evidence-based and cost-effective care, and engaging diverse stakeholders in the research process—as these are key to any strategic science movement. The Special Issue includes scholarly reviews, empirical papers, “ideas worth researching” manuscripts, and even commentaries that address these topics. These papers represent the highest-quality submissions from an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response from the eating-disorder research community, comprising both unsolicited papers and invited commentaries and reviews. We thank the authors for their contributions, and we are grateful to the many peer reviewers for their help in shaping the contents of this issue! We hope that you, the reader, will find the issue informative and thought-provoking.

REFERENCES

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