

National Institutes of Health
National Institute of mental Health
6001 Executive Blvd.,
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Michael V. Vitiello, Ph.D.
President
Sleep Research Society
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Dear Dr. Vitiello:

Thank you for your letter regarding sleep-related issues in the “National Institute of Mental Health Strategic Plan.” As you mention in your letter, sleep disorders and sleep disruption associated with various mental disorders produce significant distress and impairment, contributing to the burden of mental illness in our society. As a result, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) supports a rich portfolio of sleep-related research that spans the basic to clinical research continuum and includes research in sleep disturbances of children, adults, and the elderly. NIMH also provides career development grants to increase both the number and scope of sleep researchers.

The NIMH Strategic Plan outlines a research agenda that broadly covers many aspects and dimensions involved in mental illness, including sleep-related research. Strategic Objective 1 addresses basic cellular and molecular neurochemistry, neural circuitry, genetic susceptibilities to disease, and environmental and experiential influences. All of these topics can and do incorporate research relevant to and dependent upon sleep-related research in the NIMH portfolio. For example, NIMH-funded researchers have evaluated the role of GABAergic neurons in the hypothalamus on homeostatic sleep drive. Strategic Objective 3 addresses ways to improve existing interventions and devise new ones for the prevention, treatment and cure of mental illness. For instance, NIMH-funded researchers have been investigating sleep-related biomarkers relevant to seasonal affective disorder to determine how timed dosing of melatonin affects treatment outcomes. This novel work represents the kind of innovative research the NIMH Strategic Plan aims to support.

Although the broad scope and vision of the NIMH Strategic Plan precludes mention of many specific topics, we view the breadth of the plan as a useful umbrella to cover and include the many specific areas of research vital to our vision and mission. In this way, we view the research outlined in all four chapters the NIMH Strategic Plan to acknowledge and call for the continued support of sleep-related research in relation to the study of mental disorders.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas R. Insel, M.D.
Director