American College of Neuropsychopharmacology
bulletin





An Interview with ACNP Member, Lawrence Fung, M.D., Ph.D.

Interview conducted by Michelle Kokkinou, Ph.D.,

Neurodivergence Subcommittee Ad-Hoc Member

Q. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?

A. I am an Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine and the founding Director of the Stanford Neurodiversity Project, which in April 2026 became the Stanford Center for Neurodiversity and Human Potential. My path here was not a straight line. I trained first as a chemical engineer, earning my Ph.D. at Cornell, and spent my early career in the pharmaceutical industry studying drug metabolism and pharmacokinetics at Bristol-Myers Squibb and Neurogen. Everything changed when my son was diagnosed with autism at the age of four. I entered medicine and psychiatry so that I could care for him and for others like him, completing my M.D. at George Washington University and my residency and child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship at Stanford. What I found in psychiatry was a field built largely around a deficit-based model — one that catalogs what a person cannot do — and that model never captured my son's strengths. That realization became my mission: to bring a strengths-based approach to supporting neurodivergent people across the lifespan. My research ranges from the basic neuroscience of the GABAergic system in autism, using simultaneous [18F]flumazenil-positron emission tomography and magnetic resonance spectroscopy, to clinical and implementation science in neurodiversity-informed care, education, and employment.

Q. When did you join the ACNP?

A. I first came to the ACNP as a Travel Awardee in 2015 and presented my work on pregnenolone in autism at the 54th Annual Meeting in Hollywood, Florida, that December. I have attended nearly every year since. I was elected an Associate Member in 2018 and became a Member in 2024.

Q. As a member of the ACNP, have you had the opportunity to interact with innovative thought leaders in the field of neuroscience?

A. Absolutely. From my very first meeting as a travel awardee, the ACNP gave me access to leaders in neuropsychopharmacology whose work I had known only through their papers. Some of the most valuable moments have been the informal ones — conversations at poster sessions and receptions where a senior scientist takes a genuine interest in your data and pushes your thinking in a direction you had not considered. The meeting is intimate enough that these exchanges actually happen, and over the years those connections have grown into collaborations, peer review, and mentorship that have shaped how I approach my own science.

Q. How has your membership in the ACNP put you in touch with the professionals who have shaped the field as it currently exists - and will enable you to be one of those who shape the various neuroscientific disciplines in the future?

A. The College brings together the pioneers of neuropsychopharmacology, the investigators defining the field today, and the trainees who will define it tomorrow, all in one room. For me, the progression from travel awardee to Associate Member to Member has mirrored a progression from learning at the feet of these leaders to contributing alongside them. My neuroimaging work interrogating the GABAergic system in autism grew directly out of ideas and feedback exchanged at ACNP. And increasingly I have had the chance to help shape the field's direction myself — most recently by chairing the Neurodivergence Subcommittee of the ACNP's Experience and Resilience Committee, where the goal is to make neurodiversity a lasting part of how the College thinks about the brain.

Q. The primary functions of the College are research and education. Do you feel the College offers investigators the opportunity for cross-disciplinary communication?

A. Very much so. My own work lives at the intersection of disciplines — molecular neuroscience and neuroimaging on one side, clinical psychiatry and even industrial-organizational psychology and implementation science on the other — and the ACNP is one of the few places where all of these conversations happen under one roof. As someone who began as a basic scientist and a chemical engineer before becoming a clinician, I have always believed that the most important insights come from bidirectional translation between the bench and the clinic. The College is deliberately built to make that happen: its panels pair basic and clinical perspectives on the same question, and its poster sessions are, to my mind, the liveliest and most cross-disciplinary anywhere in the field.

Q. How about the opportunity to promote the application of various neuroscientific disciplines to the study of all forms of mental illness and their treatment? If so, how have these experiences helped your career?

A. Yes. The strength of the ACNP is that it treats the brain as a common cause across every form of mental health conditions, which is exactly the perspective a strengths-based approach to neurodiversity needs. My research applies the tools of neuropharmacology and neuroimaging to autism and neurodevelopment, but I have benefited enormously from what my colleagues studying mood, anxiety, addiction, and psychosis have learned, and I hope my work has returned the favor. Concretely, the relationships and feedback I found through the College helped me shape the questions behind my K08 career development award and the research program that followed, and they continue to serve as a sounding board as I move that work from the laboratory toward real-world implementation.

Q. Anything else to say to the readers? I know you have been involved in the Diversity efforts of the College; can you tell us about that?

A. Yes, and this is the work closest to my heart. In 2024, I had the privilege of co-chairing the Diversity and Inclusion Symposium at the Annual Meeting in Phoenix, titled "Understanding Neurodiversity and Disability Using a Strengths-Based Approach." More recently, I was asked to chair the newly formed Neurodivergence Subcommittee of the College's Experience and Resilience Committee. The premise of all of this is simple: roughly one in four of us is neurodivergent, yet our institutions — including our scientific ones — were rarely designed with neurodivergent people in mind. Through the Stanford Neurodiversity Project, and now the Stanford Center for Neurodiversity and Human Potential, I have spent a decade building programs in clinical care, education, and employment that recognize neurodivergent minds not as problems to be fixed but as a vital dimension of human potential. I am grateful that the ACNP has embraced that message, and I would encourage every member — established investigators and trainees alike — to see neurodiversity not only as a population we study but as a source of strength within our own community.