

Media Contact: Ruvi Perumal
ruvi@fountainhouse.org
(212) 582-0341 x232

FOUNTAIN HOUSE APPOINTS NEW PRESIDENT & CEO

Public Health Expert and Advocate for Social Justice, Dr. Ashwin Vasana, to Lead World-Renowned Mental Health Organization

Tuesday, September 3, 2019. Fountain House is pleased to announce the appointment of Ashwin Vasana, M.D., Ph.D., as its new President and CEO. Dr. Vasana's expertise in public health policy, programs, and political advocacy on a local and global level will advance Fountain House's work in mental illness, homelessness, criminal justice, healthcare, and social welfare for marginalized people and communities, and will allow the organization to bring its expertise to bear on the related social and political challenges of our time. Dr. Vasana will start on September 9th, 2019.

A primary care physician, academic, and public servant committed to improving the lives of vulnerable people, Dr. Vasana is currently an Assistant Professor at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and Vagelos College of Physicians & Surgeons, caring for patients and teaching graduate students and trainees in general medicine, population health, and implementation science. He will maintain his academic affiliation with Columbia while leading Fountain House.

Early in his career, Dr. Vasana worked at the non-profit, Partners In Health, and at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva and Uganda, supporting efforts to increase access to HIV/AIDS treatment in the global South. He was based in Rwanda and Lesotho during his tenure with Partners In Health, focusing on HIV, health systems and strengthening primary care delivery. Later, as the founding Executive Director of the Health Access Equity Unit at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, he led the first municipal health department program focused explicitly on the intersection of health, clinical systems, and the social welfare needs of marginalized populations, including people living with mental illness involved in the justice system.

Retiring Fountain House President, Kenneth J. Dudek, who leaves a legacy of 28 years, says, "Fountain House could not have found a more qualified candidate to take the reins at this moment in time. Governments and advocates alike are beginning to understand the importance of serious mental illness, in itself, as well as its relevance to other pressing social issues. Ashwin has the passion, talent, and experience to lead Fountain House in this pursuit of human rights and social justice. Our members are fortunate to have an advocate and visionary crusader of his caliber."

"Fountain House has a model that over 70 years has proven time and again to redirect people's trajectories and to improve outcomes. It is an approach that elevates the dignity of those whom we often so easily cast aside. I want to preserve what makes this organization great, and what has prompted hundreds of others to replicate it around the world, while also building a movement that elevates these issues and our approach in corridors of political and social power," explains Dr. Vasana.

“We have a powerful opportunity to confront the legacy of deinstitutionalization of our mental health system. People living with mental illness and serious mental illness are too-often relegated to jails, shelters, emergency rooms, or left on the streets in lieu of having access to the kind of healing, dignified environments, and services provided by Fountain House. We have an opportunity - and a responsibility - to push our public and private sectors alike to invest in proven community systems of care that promote recovery and allow people with mental illness to live dignified lives. I am proud that we can openly advocate and stand up for the rights of people with mental illness. I have stood up for these kinds of human rights and for social justice my entire professional career and will continue to do so at Fountain House,” says Dr. Vasan.

William Hilburn, Chair of the Fountain House Board of Directors, said, “We are delighted to welcome Ashwin as the next President and Chief Executive Officer. Fountain House and its community system of care represent an innovative and successful model for helping people with serious mental illness live healthier and more productive lives. Ashwin is the ideal candidate to take the organization forward into its eighth decade and next phase.”

ABOUT FOUNTAIN HOUSE

Fountain House empowers people with serious mental illness to live and thrive in society. Every day, hundreds of people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression, come to Fountain House to contribute their talents, learn new skills, access opportunities, and build friendships. Alongside staff, they operate award-winning social interventions in the areas of employment, education, wellness, and housing and work as partners to perform the functions that keep our community going. Founded in 1948, Fountain House is the most widely replicated evidence-based model for people living with mental illness in the world with over 300 model programs serving over 100,000 people throughout the US and in more than 30 countries. Fountain House is the first mental health organization to receive the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the largest and most prestigious recognition of humanitarian efforts. For more information, please visit www.fountainhouse.org