Novel challenges to psychiatry from a changing world

Donatella Marazziti1,2 and Stephen M. Stahl3,4

1Dipartimento di Medicina Clinica e Sperimentale, University of Pisa, Rome, Italy, 2University Unicamillus, Rome, Italy, 3Department of Psychiatry, Neuroscience Education Institute, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, California, USA, and 4University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Medicine is a human science, and with no doubt, psychiatry is (or should be) the specialty most intimately linked to humanity in its more comprehensive and broader sense. Psychiatry is a person-centered branch of medicine and, as such, it includes and utilizes concepts and methods deriving not only from neuroscience, but also from psychology, sociology, and anthropology. In the past century, the two approaches were strongly opposed and sometimes taken to extremes depending on genetics or early negative life events, the second on contextual or cultural variables, or habits that make an individual particularly prone toward the development of psychopathology.

At the same time, by the end of the past century, it became increasingly evident that a "pure" neuroscientific approach was not enough to achieve exhaustive management of psychiatric conditions. Currently, it is evident that psychiatric symptoms/disorders are the final pathways of multiple factors. These include individual intrinsic or acquired characteristics (the first depending on genetics or early negative life events, the second on contextual or cultural variables, or habits) that make an individual particularly prone toward the development of psychopathology.

Every individual is constantly connected to and acts on the surrounding world that changes (even for his/her activity) and sends inputs to the brain, while modifying it. This is a never-ending process that has been shaping human history and development. Therefore, a psychiatric symptom or disorder cannot be considered any longer only a brain alteration or a disorder of a sick individual, but a complex condition deriving from both personal fragility and contextual/societal features. As a result, the improvement of a psychiatric condition is not only the resolution of a brain alteration, but also provokes change in individual effects on his/her society. It is equally true that the peculiar context where individuals live and operate, together with its problems and conflicts, may act as triggering variables in the most vulnerable member of that society.

In addition, unpredictable climate changes and desertification in several countries, pollution, economic worldwide crisis, local wars provoking increasing fluxes of refugees, immigrants from poorer countries, and great nuclear catastrophes may create hitherto novel psychopathological conditions, and raise a number of unexpected and emergent problems to psychiatry practice. For all these considerations and with the urgency of novel questions psychiatrists have to face nowadays, we thought it was important to devote a special issue of “CNS Spectrums” on this topic entitled “Novel challenges to psychiatry in a changing world.”

It is evident that new problems such as those concerning the appropriateness of pharmacological treatment of subjects belonging to different ethnicities and cultural background require appropriate instruments that, perhaps, in a near future would benefit from a wider application of genetic techniques that should be less expensive and more easily available. Again, the diagnostic instruments should be translated in several languages to overcome the linguistic barrier, and validated in different populations. However, it is even more crucial to create novel and individualized diagnostic instruments to assess the psychopathological impact of climate changes, that year after year seem to become more extreme and perhaps irreversible, and those of natural and human-provoked catastrophes. All these new emergencies also require a careful deepening understanding of their etiology including neurobiological underpinnings that may collide with the economic crisis provoking a constant decrease of public research funds and resources in several wealthier countries.

According to us, the present and the future of psychiatry lie on the acceptance on these challenges and on the attempts to resolve them quickly. This process implies constructive and real integration of both neuroscientific and human science paradigms, the only one that may lead to individualized treatments that are ethical and respective of the unicity of each person.
Disclosures. Donatella Marazziti has no disclosures and she has no affiliation with or financial interest in any organization that might pose a conflict of interest. Stephen M. Stahl, MD, PhD, Dsc (Hon.) is an Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California San Diego, Honorary Visiting Senior Fellow at the University of Cambridge, UK, and Director of Psychopharmacology for California Department of State Hospitals. Over the past 36 months (January 2016–December 2018), Dr. Stahl has served as a consultant to Acadia, Adams, Alkermes, Allergan, Arbor Pharmaceuticals, AstraZeneca, Avanir, Axovant, Axsome, Biogen, Biomarin, Biopharma, Celgene, Concert, ClearView, DepoMed, Dey, EnVivo, EMD Serono, Ferring, Forest, Forum, Genomind, Innovative Science Solutions, Intra-Cellular Therapies, Janssen, Jazz, Lilly, Lundbeck, Merck, Neos, Novartis, Noveida, Orexigen, Otsuka, PamLabs, Perrigo, Pfizer, Pierre Fabre, Reviva, Servier, Shire, Sprout, Sunovion, Taisho, Takeda, Taliaz, Teva, Tonix, Trius, Vanda, Vertex, and Vifor Pharma; he has been a board member of RCT Logic and Genomind; he has served on speakers bureaus for Acadia, AstraZeneca, Dey Pharma, EnVivo, Eli Lilly, Forum, Genentech, Janssen, Lundbeck, Merck, Otsuka, PamLabs, Pfizer Israel, Servier, Sunovion, and Takeda, and he has received research and/or grant support from Acadia, Alkermes, AssureX, AstraZeneca, Arbor Pharmaceuticals, Avanir, Axovant, Biogen, Braeburn Pharmaceuticals, Bristol-Myler Squibb, Celgene, CeNeRx, Cephalon, Dey, Eli Lilly, EnVivo, Forest, Forum, GenOmind, Glaxo Smith Kline, Intra-Cellular Therapies, ISSWSH, Janssen, JayMac, Jazz, Lundbeck, Merck, Mylan, Neurocrine, Neurontics, Novartis, Otsuka, PamLabs, Pfizer, Reviva, Roche, Sepracor, Servier, Shire, Sprout, Sunovion, TMS NeuroHealth Centers, Takeda, Teva, Tonix, Vanda, Valeant, and Wyeth.

References


https://doi.org/10.1017/S1092852919001858 Published online by Cambridge University Press