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NEWS AND NOTES

Contributions to the 'News and notes' column should be sent to: Amit Malik MRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist, Hampshire Partnership NHS Trust, UK, email ip@rcpsych.ac.uk

President's international activities 2009

2009 was a busy year for the President, Professor Dinesh Bhugra, not least because of the many international visits he made in order to support and promote psychiatry and mental healthcare around the world and to meet a few of the 2684 members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists who reside outside the UK. The President attended and spoke at a variety of conferences, including the World Health Organization's Mental Health Gap Action Programme Forum in Geneva, and conferences in India, Singapore, the USA and Hong Kong. Professor Bhugra was also honoured with an International Fellowship by the American Psychiatric Association at its annual meeting in San Francisco and was conferred as a Fellow of the Academy of Medicine of Singapore at the 43rd Singapore–Malaysia Congress of Medicine. Professor Bhugra said 'the Royal College of Psychiatrists is committed to supporting its members in the UK and around the world and it is our goal to be at the forefront in setting and achieving the highest standards through education, training and research. We lead the way in developing excellence and promoting best practice in mental health services.'

As part of realising that goal, the President and the Registrar, Professor Sue Bailey, took a study tour, run by the Health Foundation, to Boston, Massachusetts, in October 2009. Many senior figures from other medical Royal Colleges and the UK National Health Service attended the tour. Its purpose was to explore the potential held by the Royal Colleges to improve quality across the National Health Service, both for clinicians' working lives and for patient outcomes. The trip included visits to a youth development organisation, a cancer institute and a media lab to see what could be learned from different systems. The President said: 'This was a unique opportunity to learn from organisations that you would not normally expect to learn from and to gain greater insight into our role as a medical Royal College in improving the health system for our members and our patients'.

International activities of the Faculty of Psychiatry of Old Age

The Faculty of Psychiatry of Old Age, since its inception as a Section in 1978 and Faculty in 1988, has been a forerunner in maintaining standards for mental health services for older people and improving education and training. The Faculty

has been eager to use this expertise for the benefit of people outside the UK and become a true player in globalisation, pursuing the recent change in College policy. In 2007/8, the Faculty established links with the Geriatric Section of the Indian Psychiatric Society and offered help with the curricula and training in old age psychiatry in India. Some final details are still being sorted out.

In 2009, the Faculty's annual residential conference was held in Barcelona and there were two pan-European symposia, with speakers from different parts of Europe. This was a good opportunity to come to an agreement with the Sociedad Española de Psicogeriatría (SEPG) (Spanish Old Age Psychiatry Association) about improving the interaction between the two organisations in exchanging speakers, training postgraduate students in old age psychiatry and utilising research opportunities.

The Faculty has recently established a bursary (£1500) open to old age psychiatrists in low- and middle-income countries for attending and presenting research at the Faculty's residential conference. The first recipient of the bursary was Dr Xia Li from China, who presented her work on suicide in older people in China.

Also in 2009, the Faculty signed an agreement on education and training with the Old Age Psychiatry Faculty of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry.

Legislative innovation in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is set to become the first jurisdiction in the world to introduce a single piece of legislation for mental health and mental incapacity, so that people who are unable to make decisions for themselves, whether this is for physical reasons or because of mental health conditions, will come under the same legislation. The law will be based on the assumption of capacity, and will have four core principles, of autonomy, justice, benefit and least harm. The Royal College of Psychiatrists' Northern Ireland Division had lobbied hard for this, arguing that it is necessary not only because there is such a strong interface between the two pieces of legislation, but also because it is important to tackle the stigma for a person who is detained under mental health legislation.

Dr Philip McGarry, Chair of the Northern Ireland Division, said a single piece of capacity-based legislation is a step towards equality for people with mental health problems. 'The modernised legislation promises to be better for people

with mental health problems, and better for society as a whole. Only a small proportion of people with mental health problems will ever need to be detained, usually because they want to harm themselves, and on some occasions because they are at risk of harming others. These people should have the same rights and protections as anyone else to whom capacity legislation applies,' he said.

Mental health day in the Middle East

On 10 October 2009, Iraq celebrated a Mental Health Day in Baghdad. The celebration was hosted by the Al-Rashad Mental Hospital with the support of the Al-Mada Media Agency. It was attended by the Minister for the Environment, the National Advisor for Mental Health, the Health Director General for Baghdad, the President of the Iraqi Psychiatric Association, the Chairman of Middle Eastern Division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and a large number of non-governmental organisations, mental health professionals, patients, families and the media. Dr Jameel Muslim, Hospital Director, welcomed the guests, gave a historical account of the hospital, and with his colleagues highlighted activities and developments, particularly in the areas of rehabilitation and continuing professional development in the hospital and throughout Iraq.

Dr Sabah Sadik, Chairman of the Middle Eastern Division, congratulated all on the progress and reiterated the Royal College of Psychiatrists' commitment to mental health services in the Middle East. Patients in the hospital

contributed to the event through musical and recreational activities.

The celebration ended with an art exhibition by patients followed by lunch by the lake at the hospital. The event was well publicised by the media, enjoyed by all and had a positive impact on the public.

Regional meeting of the Middle Eastern Division

The regional meeting of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Middle Eastern Division took place in Baghdad from 12 to 14 October 2009, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the International Medical Corps and the Iraqi Psychiatric Association. His Excellency the Minister of Health opened the meeting; in attendance were heads of organisations, officials, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. The scientific programme included keynote speeches, panel discussions, lectures and workshops. The conference covered a variety of topics, including integrating mental health into primary care, trauma, undergraduate and postgraduate education, clinical quality and substance misuse. Around 700 delegates attended the meeting, from the UK, Europe, the USA, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Bahrain, UAE and Oman, as well as Iraqi mental health professionals.

The security situation has improved in Iraq and the meeting passed without incident. The feedback from delegates was very positive and it is hoped the meeting will herald the beginning of a new era of collaboration and development in the region.

CORRESPONDENCE

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The mental health needs of the UK's Chinese children

Sir: In 2005, the Department of Health for England set a five-year action plan, *Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care*. The aim was to encourage the development of services that were more appropriate and responsive to the needs of both adults and children in Black and minority ethnic communities.

The Chinese community is the third largest immigrant group in the UK. Despite this there are few existing data concerning the mental health of Britain's Chinese population and a recent systematic review concluded that there was insufficient evidence to make any meaningful comment on the prevalence of common mental health disorders in Chinese children and adolescents in the UK (Goodman *et al*, 2008).

Why do we know so little about this significant population of children? First, it is difficult to collect information from the Chinese community. In contrast to other ethnic minority groups, which often coalesce in urban areas, resulting in a high population density, the dispersed nature of the Chinese

population makes data-gathering difficult (Cowan, 2001). Moreover, many data were collected via Chinese community organisations and may have therefore been subject to many different forms of bias (e.g. some people who identify themselves as Chinese may never attend community activities).

Paradoxically, although Chinese children are educationally among the highest achievers in the UK, many of their parents have limited literary skills and some of them are working unsociable hours in the catering business, which further limits their opportunities to develop their English language skills. This language barrier could impair the ability

Correspondence is welcome either on articles published in *International Psychiatry* or on aspects of current policy and practice in psychiatry in different countries. Letters (of up to 500 words) should be sent to:
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