

## 2008 annual general meeting of the British Indian Psychiatric Association

The British Indian Psychiatric Association (BIPA), an association for UK-based psychiatrists of Indian origin, but open to any interested psychiatrist, was established in 1995 and held its 12th annual general meeting on 14–15 June in Nottingham. The BIPA took pride in receiving Professor Dinesh Bhugra, a life member of the BIPA, to celebrate his election as the College President. The BIPA trainee award was awarded this year by Professor Sheila Hollins, to Dr Karthik Thangavellu.

The scientific programme was aimed at sharing contemporary developments in the area of the measurement of brain function. In addition to a keynote speech by Professor Harry T. Chugani, Chief of Paediatric Neurology from Michigan, other speakers included Dr Avdesh Sharma, from New Delhi, Professor K. N. Roy Chengappa from Pittsburg, Professor Diane Chugani from Michigan and Dr Lakshmi Vijayakumar from Chennai. The next morning saw a series of workshops after the formal business meeting. The event was attended by more than 120 members, their families and invited guests. BIPA activities are reported regularly on its website, [www.BIPA.org.uk](http://www.BIPA.org.uk)

**Ranjit K. Baruah**

*Immediate Past Chair, BIPA*

## Leadership and professional skills courses for young psychiatrists

The Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Programmes has developed a curriculum for courses of leadership development that is based on the provision of skills through a process of active learning and participation. A number of such courses have been held in low-, middle- and high-income countries, in the north and the south of the globe, in English and in other languages.

They are of short duration because it is often difficult for young psychiatrists to be absent from their place of work for more than a few days. The courses include a variety of topics, ranging from 'How to present a paper' and 'How to write a curriculum vitae' to work on vignettes presenting ethical problems and discussions about obtaining support for

a project and implementing it. A faculty, usually composed of four teachers – two foreign and two from the host country – spends all the time of the course with the students, thus offering ample opportunity for informal contacts between teachers and students in addition to discussions in the more formal setting of the agenda of the course. Professor Sir David Goldberg has been immensely useful as one of the foreign members of the faculty in a considerable number of the courses, but many other leading experts – including Professors J. Füredi, H. Helmchen, C. Höschl and M. Sato – have been involved in their organisation and conduct, and have made splendid contributions to their success.

The courses are being organised by the Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Programmes, a non-governmental not-for-profit organisation with its seat in Geneva; support for the travel and accommodation of the students and teachers has come from various sources, including several pharmaceutical companies (notably Eli Lilly and Company and Servier), universities, scientific institutions, governments and donations.

The next international course will be held in Singapore in February 2009.

**Professor Norman Sartorius**

*President, Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Programmes*

## Report on the assembly of the World Psychiatric Association

Professor Sheila Hollins attended the Ordinary and Extraordinary Assemblies of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) in Prague on 22 September 2008. The College President, Professor Dinesh Bhugra, was an observer, as was Professor Hamid Ghodse, as a member of the Planning Committee. Professor Sheila Hollins presented a brief paper on behalf of the College on the global mental health implications of climate change.

During the general assembly, Professor John Cox, past Secretary General of the WPA, received an Honorary Fellowship for his contribution to the WPA. Professor Sheila Hollins, immediate past President of the College, received an Honorary Membership for her services to the WPA.

Dr Pedro Ruiz from the United States is now President-elect and Dr Levent Küey from Turkey is the new Secretary General.

### CORRESPONDENCE

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## Ongoing changes in Irish psychiatry: trainees' perspectives

**Sir:** Your readers might be interested to know about the changes to Irish training. Currently, the Irish Psychiatric Training Committee (IPTC) is the statutory body regulating psychiatric training in Ireland. Alongside the IPTC, the Royal College of Psychiatrists provides accreditation and educational approval to training schemes

and programmes. There are currently 12 training schemes in Ireland, with approximately 500 trainees. The Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Training (CSCT) and entry onto the specialist register of the Irish Medical Council are awarded after 3–4 years of basic training as a senior house officer/registrar followed by another 3–4 years of higher training as senior registrar.

Irish psychiatry is presently in a process of restructuring. On 1 January 2009, a new College of Psychiatry of Ireland, autonomous from the UK Royal College, came into being,

and an indigenous training and assessment programme is expected to be in place from 2010. This change provides a unique opportunity for recent advances in medical education to form the basis of the new training programme. Steering groups are now developing the new training programme and its delivery. As part of this process, a pilot on workplace-based assessments is already under way in Dublin.

For Irish trainees, the initial anxieties brought on by these changes are fast giving way to corresponding levels of enthusiasm and a motivation to shape the changes as they occur. In this regard, the Trainees' Section of the Irish College has recently embarked on a project to explore ways of optimising the awareness and participation of all trainees in College activities at this time of change, and to position themselves as key stakeholders in the emerging new College.

One key issue of concern for pre-membership trainees has been the prospect of being ineligible to sit the MRCPsych examinations after spring 2010 under the current eligibility criteria. However, the Royal College and its Irish Division are working to ensure that Irish trainees continue to meet eligibility criteria until the 'Irish exams' become fully established. Of note, as the Irish College emerges, Irish trainees will retain their entitlement to join the Royal College as international members, and thereby continue to enjoy the benefits that come with it, such as access to journals and rebates on conference fees.

We feel that collaboration and exchange of experiences with our peers both in the UK and in the wider European context, as occurs at the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT), will be beneficial. We would welcome an opportunity to retain our seats at the Psychiatric Trainees Committee of the Royal College, since we are likely to continue to sit the MRCPsych exams in the foreseeable future and an ongoing forum for exchange of ideas and experiences with our UK colleagues would be invaluable, especially in these initial stages of the Irish College's inception.

For psychiatric trainees in Ireland, the time ahead is both challenging and exciting. We look forward to the advent of the new College of Psychiatry of Ireland – one that is committed to providing training that is comparable with the best in the world. This will ensure that Irish patients continue to enjoy the highest standards of mental healthcare.

**Izu Nwachukwu MBBS MRCPsych<sup>1</sup>  
and Elizabeth Barrett MB DCH MRCP<sup>2</sup>**

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of Psychiatrists

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: Amit Malik MRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist, Hampshire Partnership NHS Trust, UK, email ip@rcpsych.ac.uk.

## Supervision – an issue in Portuguese psychiatric training

'Better than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher.' (Japanese proverb)

**Sir:** There are rising concerns regarding postgraduate medical training in Portugal. The lack of supervisors is one critical factor adversely affecting psychiatric training. In the past few years, employment in the public sector has been considerably reduced. New appointments for consultants have been frozen. Recently qualified specialists either look for a job in the private sector or accept insecure contracts in the public sector. Unable to compete with the private sector in terms of employment benefits, public services are losing consultant psychiatrists, and this has led to shortages in every setting, from out-patient clinics to hospital wards, from emergency rooms to rehabilitation units. This inevitably has an impact on current psychiatric training. In a process of teaching and learning, adequate supervision is an essential element of training. With its clear implications for patient safety, supervision must be carried out within clearly defined lines of responsibility.

Unfortunately, the current laws and regulations on training do not provide a clear definition of supervision, its frequency, structure and contents, or the trainee's responsibilities. As each training institution uses its own interpretation of the law, training standards become inconsistent, with some trainees being directly and regularly supervised while others receive almost no supervision at all. There are reports of a lack of supervision in most settings, including in-patient and out-patient clinics. The situation is particularly critical in emergency rooms, where trainees, especially in their last years of training, are often left unsupervised.

A vast majority of consultant psychiatrists are in their fifties, prompting speculations that the lack of supervisors may become acute in a few years' time, when they retire.

The situation is exacerbated by recent proposals to change the way the healthcare system in Portugal is financed and managed. There are major concerns that the model of healthcare provision based on commercial insurance will focus primarily on short-term profitability rather than maintaining high standards of medical training.

To address these concerns, the Portuguese Medical Association has begun to assess training institutions on a regular basis, while the Portuguese Psychiatric Trainee Association is monitoring the trainees' satisfaction with supervision.

More needs to be done, however, to increase the quality of supervision. Without clearly defined laws and regulations on supervision in training, describing the roles of the trainee, the trainer and the training institution, and defining competencies for each stage of training, we cannot hope to maintain high standards in training. Compliance with those laws and regulations must be regularly monitored to motivate senior doctors to play an active role in training.

For great teachers to provide great teaching, we have to give them the proper conditions to teach.

**Luis Mendonça**

Portuguese Association of Psychiatric Trainees (APIP)