

intervention following traumatic events for those with acute stress disorder (Bryant *et al*, 1999).

Mental health problems are stigmatised, yet we now have powerful evidence-based psychological treatments for many common but serious disorders such as depression, phobias, panic disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. It would be regrettable if the legitimate debate on the role of counselling for everyday problems and difficulties were to inadvertently prevent people with

treatable disorders from accessing helpful psychological therapies.

**Bryant, R. A., Sackville, T., Dang, S. T., et al (1999)**

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## One hundred years ago

### A hospital for the insane in Syria

THE treatment of lunatics in the East has not yet fully emerged from the clouds of ignorance and barbarism which have surrounded it for ages. One of the first reformers who attempted to introduce the methods of humanity and science in this field in the near East was Mr. Theophilus Waldmeier, a gentleman resident in Syria, who commenced in the spring of 1896 the work of helping and providing for the numerous sufferers from mental disease in Syria and Palestine. His efforts were crowned with success and within two years a hospital for the insane was built near Beyrout on the slopes of the Lebanon Mountains. This institution has been in full working order and has been doing good

work for two years. In the fourth annual report recently issued there is an account of the institution and of its work for the year ended March 31st, 1902. The building, which includes wards for male and female patients, is of stone; the grounds, which were hitherto barren, have been cultivated; and at the time of the report (1902) there were about 35 patients in the hospital. Patients come and go without much difficulty being experienced, as relatives are sometimes prone to take them away before recovery is complete. "One poor Jewish woman was brought to the hospital suffering from acute mania. . . . She was left by her relatives apparently under the idea that she would be miraculously healed in a day or two by the doctor. After a few days they returned and found her about the same, and

being disappointed at this they immediately took her away, probably to put her in some dungeon or cave noted for casting out evil spirits, there possibly to die in chains." Fortunately, adds the report, such cases are becoming rarer as the results of the work of the hospital are becoming more known amongst the people. 14 patients were discharged as recovered during the year. New wards are nearly completed for increased accommodation, so that the hospital will shortly be able to house 100 patients. 52 patients were admitted during the year.

### REFERENCE

*The Lancet*, 17 January 1903, 189.

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