

Bank: CBA Martin Place Sydney Australia  
 BSB: 062 000  
 Account No: 1164 5054

### Earthquake disaster in the Sichuan province of China

More than 50 000 people are estimated to have died in the earthquake which struck Sichuan province on 12 May 2008, China's deadliest natural disaster in a generation. China disclosed that at least 4 million apartments and homes had been damaged or destroyed, leaving almost 5 million people homeless. The Chinese Society of Psychiatry (CSP) and the Asian Disaster Mental Health Network are joining forces to raise funds. The Section on Disaster Intervention of the World Psychiatric Association sent its guidelines on disaster management and minimum standards in mental health management in disasters. Further plans for phased mental health disaster recovery are being developed by the Chinese Society of Psychiatry and the Asian Federation of Psychiatric Associations will participate in this work.

*Dr Russell D'Souza*  
 Chair, Asian Disaster Mental Health Network, AFPA

## BPPA Awards 2008

The British Pakistani Psychiatric Association (BPPA) offers a number of awards each year. The Young Researcher of

the Year Award aims to promote an interest in psychiatric research among young Pakistani health professionals and students whose research work, in any sub-specialty or psychiatric field, has been published in any peer-reviewed scientific journal. There are two categories – one for research carried out in Pakistan and the other for research carried out in the UK or Ireland. The winners and runners-up will be entitled to memorial shields and cash rewards equivalent of £250 and £150, respectively.

The Clinical Audit Award offers memorial shields and cash awards of £100 and £50 to the winner and runner-up, respectively. An independent evaluation committee will short-list the six best projects and the short-listed candidates will be invited to present their projects at the 7th Annual Conference of the BPPA on 1–2 November 2008.

The Public Education Award is a new prize for promoting an interest in public education in mental health issues among Pakistani media professionals, artists, health professionals and students.

Further information and nomination forms for any of the above awards may be obtained by emailing secretary@bppauk.org or visiting www.bppauk.org. All nominations must be received by 31 August 2008. The results will be announced by 30 September 2008.

*Dr S. H. Jawed*  
 Chairman, BPPA

## CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence should be sent to: Amit Malik MRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist, Hampshire Partnership NHS Trust, UK, email ip@rcpsych.ac.uk

## Ethno-psychopharmacology

**Sir:** We read the article by Pi & Zhu (2007) with interest, as this topic is particularly important to psychiatrists practising in countries like Sri Lanka, where, because of the lack of local prescribing guidelines, the dosing of medication is generally determined by guidelines developed for patients in the West, such as those from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the *British National Formulary*.

There are reports that Asian people generally require lower doses of psychotropic medications than White people and also that they have a lower threshold for extrapyramidal side-effects (Lin & Finder, 1983). This may be because of genetic and biological variations in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics. Therefore it seems prudent to observe the rule of thumb 'start low and go slow' when prescribing psychotropics, in order to achieve a clinical improvement while avoiding adverse effects.

Self-adjustment of doses of medications is commonly seen among our patients, and that can lead to suboptimal therapeutic responses and more side-effects. Hence it is important to explain treatment decisions and the adjustment of doses.

Another factor which has to be kept in mind is that these patients may also be on concomitant herbal medication. There have been reports that some herbal medications

(particularly Asian herbal mixtures) are contaminated with heavy metals (Ernst & Thompson Coon, 2001). Herbal medications may also be adulterated with prescription drugs or contain misidentified herbal ingredients. The presence of these constituents may alter the pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamics of psychotropics, leading to toxic effects as well as suboptimal clinical improvement. Patients should be asked about the use of herbal medications, and be educated and cautioned with regard to the possible interactions between herbs and psychotropics.

Therefore, it is important to consider the inter-racial pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic differences as well as environmental and cultural factors when determining the dosage of psychotropics for our patients.

### A. Hapangama<sup>1</sup> and K. A. L. A. Kuruppuarachchi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer in Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Ragama, Sri Lanka

<sup>2</sup>Professor of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Ragama, Sri Lanka, email lalithkuruppu@lycos.com

Ernst, E. & Thompson Coon, J. (2001) Heavy metals in traditional Chinese medicines: a systematic review. *Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics*, **70**, 497–504.

Lin, K. M. & Finder, E. (1983) Neuroleptic dosage for Asians. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, **140**, 490–491.

Pi, E. H. & Zhu, W. (2007) New research advances in ethno-psychopharmacology: an Asian perspective. *International Psychiatry*, **4**, 57–58.