

political jurisdictions have increasingly divergent approaches to service model, budget and strategic priorities. Further, even within a particular jurisdiction (in the UK or elsewhere) there are often substantial regional or local variations in funding, clinical priorities and context, which may mean that psychiatrists work in very different ways in different locations.

Recent major changes in organisation and strategic vision of mental health services in the UK (Craddock *et al*, 2008), as in other high-income countries (e.g. Madianos & Christodoulou, 2007; Muijen, 2010), have meant the traditional role of the psychiatrist has been changing, even to the extent that the very future of psychiatry as a specialty has been questioned (Katschnig, 2010). Whatever the developments, it is essential that role changes are not purely driven by legislation, politics or ideology (Craddock *et al*, 2008). Rather, changes should make use of psychiatrists' core expertise, and the special expertise of other professionals, in a way that enhances patient care and ensures the quality and safety of services (Craddock & Craddock, 2010).

The readership of *International Psychiatry* will be fully aware that there are many parts of the world in which psychiatrists and mental health services are non-existent, sparse or rudimentary. Where and when it is available, psychiatric expertise is a very valuable resource for a healthcare service and it is important that this resource is used as effectively as possible. The core skills of the psychiatrist should be matched to the professional role in a way that maximises benefits to both individual patients and to the service as a whole (Craddock *et al*, 2010). Such matching and clarity may also enhance psychiatric professional identity, encourage recruitment and increase morale and job satisfaction.

Implications for the Royal College of Psychiatrists

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is a major international professional organisation with a membership from a wide range of geographical and cultural backgrounds and active international structures, including the International Divisions and, of course, this journal. Many members have experience of working in widely differing service settings (Ghodse, 2003), for example moving between one or more UK jurisdictions and even between services on different continents. The College is, therefore, ideally placed (perhaps uniquely among organisations that provide training and accreditation) to be able to take a 'big picture' perspective that has relevance and

influence beyond any local political, ideological, economic or cultural imperatives (Kulhara & Avasthi, 2007; Mullick, 2007) and is capable of offering some degree of temporal and situational stability. The richness and breadth of experience of the College's members can usefully inform the principles used in all service developments: in other words, the general features of psychiatric excellence (perhaps they might be called the 'psychiatric basics'?).

This will help to ensure that, two centuries after J. C. Reil, the eminent German physician, first described the specialty of psychiatry (Reil & Hoffbauer, 1808; Marneros, 2008), patients can continue to benefit from the particular expertise and training of medical practitioners who specialise in psychiatric illness and who use their broad medical and biological expertise and diagnostic skills effectively within the context of an appreciation of psychosocial factors and the full range of available treatment modalities (Craddock, 2010).

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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

College Eating Disorders Section

During the Eating Disorders Awareness Week in February, psychiatrists of the 'damaging portrayal' of eating disorders in the media and called for a new editorial code to be drawn up to encourage the media to stop promoting unhealthy body images and 'glamorising' eating disorders.

Instead, the media should be encouraged to use images of people with more diverse body shapes, and help people feel more positive about their own bodies.

Members of the College Eating Disorders Section are increasingly concerned about the harmful influence of the media on people's body image and self-esteem, and called for a new forum to tackle the issue. The forum should include

representatives from the media and advertising agencies, regulatory bodies, eating disorder experts, eating disorder organisations and politicians. The psychiatrists are being backed in their call by the eating disorders charity, Beat.

UK International Health Links Funding Scheme (IHLFS)

IHLFS is a 3-year scheme that supports 'Health Links' between health institutions in low- and middle-income countries and the UK. Funded by the UK Department for International Development and the Department of Health, and jointly managed by THET (Tropical Health and Education Trust)

and the British Council, IHLFS (Round 2) is now open for applications. The scheme aims to strengthen the capacity of health services in low- and middle-income countries by providing £1.25 million each year to support the work of Health Links – formalised partnerships between a health institution in a low- or middle-income country and a counterpart in the UK. The purpose of a Link is to strengthen health systems and improve health service delivery by allowing for a reciprocal transfer of skills and knowledge between people working in the healthcare sector. Round 2 has funding available for start-up grants of up to £3000 and project grants of up to £15000 a year for 1 year or 22 months. Further details can be obtained at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-healthlinks.htm>.

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Edinburgh in retrospect: the 2010 College Congress

Sir: Great cities evoke memories and invoke visions. The June 2010 College International Congress held in Edinburgh did both for this correspondent. The reminiscence is of a place for the bridging of art and science, and for recalling the value of mentors such as Henry Walton, Bob Kendell and Norman Kreitman, who had encouraged my international journeyings. The vision was of a Royal College as a truly international organisation – a prospect first glimpsed at the Edinburgh annual meeting in 2000, and when the College had co-hosted a meeting with the Association of European Psychiatrists (AEP) in 1996.

We later celebrated, with the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), the millennium in a 2001 'Mind Odyssey of Psychiatry and the Arts' at the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre in Westminster – a costly but apt venue. The international arts certainly flourished on that occasion. Guy Woolfenden's commissioned music *Paeon* was performed by vocalists and a brass ensemble at the opening ceremony, actors approached delegates in the coffee breaks, Ismond Rosen's fine sculptures were displayed, and the College music society held its first meeting. The scientific programme was also invigorating. Dr Gro Brundtland, Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), received the Honorary Fellowship.

Yet at most such major international congresses there are conflicts of loyalties, as well as conflicts of interests, to be considered. These occasions, including the recent Congress in Edinburgh, were no exceptions. There was learning to be done. I would respectfully suggest, therefore, that several international issues might be reconsidered by the organising committee, and by College officers, when reviewing the venues and the content of future annual meetings.

- Specifically, to welcome and, when appropriate, subsidise international delegates.
- Devise new ways of encouraging more Honorary Fellows to attend. They can, and should in my opinion, be able

to contribute more actively to College affairs. The College needs to retain their brains as well as their resources.

- Establish an inclusive high-profile international reception – an excellent time to give international guests a chance to meet each other, and to converse with past and present College officers.
- Consider a strategy for enhancing the profile of the International Divisions and of the International Advisory Committee – the successor to the International Board.
- Continue to publicise formal business meetings with WPA officers.
- Review the strategy, and the protocol, for working within the WPA, and for welcoming its President. It is the only world organisation for all psychiatrists that can guard, through its Review Committee, the rights of patients and psychiatrists, and can provide academic and clinical support for isolated colleagues.
- Consider the timing and content of the Annual General Business Meeting. It is the only formal occasion when any member of the College, including its international members, can raise with due notice matters of importance and listen to pre-circulated reports from College officers.

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Hikikomori in Japan

Sir: *Hikikomori* is the name given to a major problem in Japan: extreme social withdrawal (the term is a compound of *hiki*, withdraw, and *komoru*, hide). The condition is reminiscent of social phobia – an apparent fear of exposure to and embarrassment within social situations, driving avoidant behaviour. In *hikikomori*, the isolation is frequently extreme; people with the condition have been known to lock themselves in their bedroom for several years. The age range of those affected is rather narrow: they are generally young adults. The sustained isolation is in part