

Dear Member,

Welcome to this latest edition of the Spirituality and Psychiatry Newsletter, No. 20, January 2006.

The first announcement, and one that gives me great pleasure, concerns the annual essay prize offered by the SIG. The award for 2005 has been given to Dr. Nicki Crowley for her paper 'Psychosis or Spiritual Emergence? - Consideration of the Transpersonal Perspective within Psychiatry'. Nicki will be talking on this subject at the SIG meeting on 31st March (see below) and her paper will subsequently be published on our Website. May I take the chance of urging psychiatrists, including trainees, to consider submitting papers for this year's prize? Details of the prize and how to apply can be found on our SIG homepage.

Next, our Executive committee wants to raise its profile in order to interest new members. With the exception of its officers (chair, secretary and treasurer) it is informally constituted and members serve for variable period (often according to other demands placed on them in a busy schedule). However, since everyone on the Executive is tasked with specific commitments, around four years would be the kind of time needed to make an effective contribution to the work of the committee. Meetings are held from 9 -10.30 on the occasion of each one-day programme, at the College Annual meeting, and on two other half-days, around six times a year in all. It is important that members can attend most meetings to ensure continuity and are willing to liaise in between times by phone and email.

There is a surprising amount to do - we hope that the good work of the SIG glides forward like the proverbial swan, but there is some hard paddling going on underneath the water! Where employing Trusts are not able to help with the cost of attending, funds are available from the SIG. Finding time is often the problem, but the case can be made to Trusts of the need to support recognised College activities and generally, where there is a will, there is also a way. We do want to involve trainees in the work of the Executive because our concern is very much to plan for future changes to the form and content of psychiatric training. Finally, while it is not our aim formally to represent faith traditions, we want to be as broad as possible in terms of religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

If you think you might like to become more involved, please flag up your interest to our chair, Dr. Sarah Egger, by writing to her via Sue Duncan, Special Interest Groups Administrator at the college (sduncan@rcpsych.ac.uk) indicating your experience and areas of interest. Secondly, it would be helpful to meet you informally, probably at a SIG meeting, where Dr. Egger and other members of the Executive would be present. The Executive then could bear in mind your wish to become more involved the next time a vacancy arises on the committee.

A further concern of the Executive is to get more feedback from the membership as a whole. While the maxim 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' may well apply (in view of our expanding membership), we certainly don't want to be complacent and there is always room for improvement. We will be devising a

questionnaire to be circulated with 'News and Notes' and look forward to receiving your suggestions.

Returning now to the Newsletter, included in this issue are the texts of two talks given at a meeting of the Special Interest Group at the College on 21st October last, by Fr. Adrian McKenna and Cristina Gangemi. My thanks to Adrian and Cristina for permission to reproduce their texts. The programme, on 'Special needs, special gifts - learning disability and spirituality', was debated with compassion and touched on many of the deepest aspects of life.

Next came the one-day programme on 'Spirituality and Religion in Later Life' on December 14th, held jointly with the Faculty of Old Age Psychiatry. This is surely a subject worthy of the widest discussion - one thing of which we can all be certain, if we don't die first, is growing old! There were excellent presentations, which I hope to be able to include, in due course, in the Spring issue of the Newsletter

In this issue, you will also find notice of our next SIG meeting, to be held on March 31st at the College, on 'Psychosis, Psychedelics and the Transpersonal Journey'. Much thought has been given to the preparation of this event by the panel of speakers and a flyer will also be going out with 'News and Notes'. If you hope to join us, please make sure you book early as places are limited. You may also be particularly interested to read the paper published in this issue by Drs. Randal and Argyle on 'Spiritual Emergency' – a useful explanatory model?

The Christ-centred Spiritist movement in Brazil has had an enormous influence on medicine, healing and, indeed, the whole culture of that country, but also has a significant presence in Europe including the UK. Do read the article by Elsa Rossi, which beautifully conveys, in a personal and dignified way, what it means to be a medium in the Spiritist movement. Psychiatrists in Brazil have successfully combined medical care with working with mediums and healers, and we have much to learn from them.

I was particularly pleased to be able to publish the short article by Dr. Siddiquee, a trainee psychiatrist. We need more such contributions and Dr. Siddiquee shows that it is both possible to work for the MRCPsych examination and keep an open and enquiring mind at the same time – not always an easy thing to do!

As always, I would like to encourage you to let me have any articles you have written that you would like to see published on our Website, as Word or rtf files to sduncan@rcpsych.ac.uk and headed 'for the attention of Dr. Andrew Powell'.

With best wishes for the New Year,
Andrew Powell (editor)