

'From the Chair'

Professor Chris Cook

As I contribute some reflections 'from the Chair' for the first time, it seems only fitting to offer my appreciation of the hard work and enthusiastic lead that Sarah Egger has given to the SIG in the last four years. This is a hard act to follow! However, it has made things easier in that, at the end of Sarah's term of office, the SIG finds itself with a growing membership (now over 1200) and an engaging programme of activities which continues to attract wide interest amongst our members and in the College as a whole. Furthermore, we have recently seen publication by The Royal College of Psychiatrists Press of *Spirituality and Psychiatry*, a book written by members of the SIG and others, which we hope will further debate about the importance of spirituality in clinical care and future research in psychiatry.

Spirituality in mental healthcare is a topic of interest not only within the UK. The SIG has had involvement over recent years in a debate within the World Psychiatric Association as to the place that spirituality and religion should be accorded in the practice of psychiatry internationally. Whilst this has not yet led to the kind of position statement that we would like to see endorsed by the WPA, it is certainly encouraging that there has been such a vigorous debate in the international psychiatric community.

What should we hope for over the next four years? My priorities would be to ensure that the SIG contributes effectively in all relevant areas of College work (e.g. curriculum and policy), supports members in integrating spirituality within their own clinical practice, and encourages academic debate about the place of spirituality in mental health research and practice both at home and on the international scene. I consider it important that the SIG continues to be inclusive of members of all faith traditions and of those whose spirituality is independent of these traditions.

I would be interested to know what SIG members think should be our priorities over the next four years. Please feel free to be in touch by e-mail (s.duncan@rcpsych.ac.uk putting 'for the attn of Chris Cook' in the subject box) or letter (again via Sue Duncan at the College). I cannot promise that all suggestions will be taken up, but I can promise that they will be considered carefully and that they will contribute to the Executive Committee's on-going debate for forward planning.

With all good wishes,

Professor Chris Cook