

From the Chair

Dr. Sarah Egger

I have just returned from a memorable one-day SIG on Mindfulness, Meditation and Mental Health. I felt it had all the ingredients that make our meetings so enjoyable and convivial. We usually have only three speakers and this gives a chance to develop ideas with plenty of time for discussion. This is where I think things can really get interesting – taking us into territory that reflects our members concerns. There is also an opportunity at the end for all three speakers to respond and talk to each other, which further builds on the themes that have developed over the day. This is a fascinating process and I invariably come away from feeling inspired filled with new thoughts. Our next meeting on Consciousness and the Extended Mind certainly looks as though it will be even more exciting and will fill up quickly so book early if you are intending to attend.

As our meetings are generally oversubscribed, we have needed to move to No. 15 Belgrave Square to accommodate everyone. We are getting used to the facilities there and hope that we can continue to organise meetings that have wide appeal to our membership. We have had to raise prices to cover the cost of the venue but I hope you will agree that our study days still provide excellent value for money.

It has been a productive and busy year for the Executive and as I enter my last months as Chair, it feels like a good time to reflect on the previous few years. Our numbers continue to increase and currently represent 15% of the College membership, having topped the 2000 mark. We have contributed to each Annual College Meeting with a variety of subjects and our meditation workshop is so popular (it is always full) that it has been invited back for the 6th year. Perhaps it is a sign of how much we as individual practitioners, as well as our patients, need the skills and practice that promote a peaceful state of mind.

Many of the Executive and a number of other authors have contributed to our book 'Spirituality and Psychiatry', which we expect to be published by the College in spring 2009. Education is an area in which we would really like to have more impact. We have made detailed suggestions to the curriculum committee but the slow process of revising the curriculum means that these suggestions are still awaiting consideration. Spirituality, religion, beliefs and values do at least get mention in new curriculum. In the meantime, the College training unit has asked us to develop a training day and we hope to run that from a venue up North. We are working on a submission for online CPD and are very keen to see consideration of patient's spiritual needs becoming incorporated into standard psychiatric care.

Recent correspondence following the Psychiatric Bulletin editorial by Professor Harold Koenig indicates that there continues to be controversy over the whole question of spirituality and mental health. Personally, I cannot understand how we can aspire to practise person-centred or whole-person

care without enquiry into this pivotal and powerful aspect of people's lives. It would seem essential for us to understand what are a person's sources of strength and hope, where potential internal conflicts may arise and how they may be engaged therapeutically. We will continue to champion the inclusion of this area of people's lives in the standard psychiatric history.

I trust we will continue to develop our own spirituality as well as responding to our patients' spiritual needs. I am particularly interested in the subject of 'presence' and relationship in healthcare, which I feel has a distinctly spiritual component.

Over the last year, we have contributed towards a number of College consultation documents and policies. Many of our Executive have given lectures and workshops all over the country, contributing to the growing interest in this subject. We continue to enjoy collaborating with other Special Interest Groups, Faculties and other organisations to bring this significant and important area of our own and our patients' lives to the wider attention of college members.

This year has also seen a number of changes to the Executive and I would like personally to thank retiring members Larry Culliford, Cherrie Cogan, Mohamed Salem, Robert Lawrence and Sumudu Chandraratne for all their dedication and hard work. I would also like to welcome Simon Dein, Dr Jameel Hussain, Paramabandhu Groves and Anjum Bashir. I wish to thank all the members of the Executive for their ongoing commitment to the SIG and the very significant amount of time they devote to it.

I wish you all the very best for the season and the forthcoming New Year. For all those of you that haven't seen it, I do recommend a holiday treat, the vivid and articulate account given by the neuroscientist Jill Taylor, (<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=UyyjU8fzEYU>) on her immediate experience of a stroke and what it was like to see the world through the right hemisphere; it turned out to be an extraordinary and profoundly spiritual experience.

With warm greetings,
Sarah Egger