

possible decision can cause enormous stress. Some people find uncertainty in their lives more difficult to handle than others. These people are at risk of making a decision before they have the information they need, in the urge to have everything settled. Others are more relaxed with uncertainty and are more stressed by the idea of making a decision too soon, and so constraining their options. These people are always waiting for the next piece of information that will help them make the perfect decision, and the danger here, of course, is that they never make a decision at all.⁵

The benefits of procrastination

Even when you have all the information you need, sometimes putting it all on the back burner and letting your subconscious have a go can help. There is a natural history to important decisions like leaving jobs, relationships, or countries. The evidence builds slowly, and one day the balance tips and you know what to do.

If you are having trouble making the final decision, remember:

- If a decision is hard to make, then both or all your options must have value
- There is no such thing as a bad decision. Different decisions just bring you different experiences in life, all valuable
- Few decisions are irreversible
- Life is a series of explorations, not a fast train to a known destination.⁶

Lessons from Butch and the Kid

When Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid jumped off the cliff into the ravine, they felt fear. They howled as they fell. And they laughed when they bobbed up in the foam and realised they were still alive. If you know you want to leave your job and it is only fear that is holding you back, just do it.

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P+ Go to web extra on bmjcareers.com/careerfocus for an example of turning a decision to change career into an asset

- 1 Houghton A. Leaving your job: part 1. *BMJ Career Focus* 2004;93-4.
- 2 Houghton A. Leaving your job: part 2. *BMJ Career Focus* 2004;106.
- 3 Houghton A. Values? What values? *BMJ* 2002;324(suppl):s59.
- 4 Houghton A. Take a new look at your life. *BMJ* 2002;324(suppl):s172.
- 5 Houghton A. Using the Myers Briggs type indicator for career development. *BMJ* 2000;320(suppl): s2.
- 6 Jeffers S. *Feel the fear and do it anyway*. Rider, 1997.



Women in Psychiatry Special Interest Group

Rosalind Ramsay *outlines how this group can help women psychiatrists and their female patients*

In 1995, a group of psychiatrists approached the Royal College of Psychiatrists to start a special interest group (SIG) concerned with women psychiatrists and women patients.

What does it do?

The Women in Psychiatry SIG aims to improve the working lives of women psychiatrists. It also seeks to provide holistic care to women using mental health services.

Why?

Among doctors working in psychiatry, 47% of basic trainees, 53% of higher trainees, 55% of staff and associate specialist grades, and 36% of consultants are women (Royal College of Psychiatrists, personal communication, November 2003). Twenty two per cent of the fellows of the Royal College of Psychiatrists are women, and the United Kingdom currently has 21 women professors of psychiatry. One in five specialist registrars in psychiatry train flexibly.

What about the patients?

About half the patients in mental health services are women, although in old age services women outnumber men by two to one as they live longer. Anxiety, depression, and eating disorders are all more common in women.¹ Other disorders such as puerperal psychosis, postnatal depression, and premenstrual dysphoric disorder are specific to women. Biological differences also exist between men and women—for example, in side effects of drugs. Socioeconomic and psychological factors associated with poverty, unemployment, and social isolation are relevant. In addition, women's health is affected by experiences of child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and sexual violence and assault. Women have different roles, not only as mothers but also as carers for other family members, including their own parents. Specialist services for trauma, eating disorders, and mother and baby units are not uniformly available throughout the United Kingdom.

Recent years have seen a push for improved services for women patients. *Safety, Privacy and Dignity in Mental Health Units* set a standard to eliminate mixed sex accommodation for inpatients by 2002.² Since then, the Department of Health's consultation document *Women's Mental Health: Into the Mainstream*¹ provided an evidence base to inform and demonstrate the need for gender sensitive and gender specific services.³

What does this mean in practice?

The Women in Psychiatry SIG can achieve its objectives in a variety of ways. For example, it has an educational role in raising awareness

Further information

- For more details about the Women In Psychiatry SIG go to the Royal College of Psychiatrists website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk
- Email the SIG coordinator, Sue Duncan: sduncan@rcpsych.ac.uk for contact details
- The Women in Psychiatry SIG is joining the University of Keele in a two day national conference on women and psychiatry, 29-30 April 2004. For more details contact Louise Alston: l.c.alston@keele.ac.uk

of women specific issues both to the psychiatry profession and to the wider mental health community. It represents the interests of women psychiatrists within the college and outside it—for example, with links to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. It also brings together women psychiatrists working in a range of services for women, and it helps to enhance and develop services which address the needs of women.

Career development

We focus on the training needs of psychiatrists. We would like to look at ways of supporting women in mentoring schemes and through local networking. We are trying to ensure that trainees receive adequate training in gender awareness and issues around women's mental health—for example, domestic violence and its impact on the family.

To raise the profile of women in academic psychiatry we have started an annual prize, which is open to all college members on a theme around women's mental health.

To facilitate flexible working patterns we organise a job share register for all college members. The college has commissioned a piece of work on race equality issues within it. This has also highlighted some issues around gender discrimination. The college has launched a steering group to consider other equality issues including those around gender.

We organise sessions and workshops at the annual meeting of the college, and we encourage other members to organise local meetings around the needs of women psychiatrists and women patients. We usually hold open meetings twice a year. The SIG also has male members (6%) and is open to all members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

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- 1 Department of Health. *Women's mental health: into the mainstream*. London: DoH, 2002.
- 2 NHS Executive. *Safety, privacy and dignity in mental health units*. London: Department of Health, 2000.
- 3 Department of Health. *Mainstreaming gender and women's mental health*. London: DoH, 2003.