

RCPsych Annual General Meeting 11 July 2023

Report of the President



I am honored to have continued in the post of President in 2022/23 and in doing so, to have completed my tenure as the President. It has been one of the greatest honours of my life and by far the most professionally rewarding experience. I will never forget the privilege that I've had in this post, representing so many of you and continuing to achieve the aims of the College.

All our success and progress must always be traced back to our mission statement – to secure the best outcomes for people with mental illness, learning difficulties and developmental disorders by promoting excellent mental health services, training outstanding psychiatrists, promoting quality and research, setting standards and being the voice of psychiatry.

We would not be able to do this without the spirit and effort of our members, so I am incredibly proud of the great strides that the College has made to support you. We must continue to ensure that the psychiatric profession remains central to the mental health workforce. Beyond my tenure, I am confident that we will continue to provide excellent mental health services, train outstanding psychiatrists, promote quality and research, set standards and be the voice of psychiatry.

I want to take this moment to also reflect on some of the challenges that we have faced in the last year. We are still facing rising levels of demand on a workforce that is over-stretched and under-resourced amidst the ongoing effects of the pandemic, wars and displacements, industrial action and a cost-of-living crisis.

On behalf of the college, I express my deepest sympathies to those who are facing professional and personal obstacles, and my gratitude and pride for the way that you have continued to overcome them.

Firstly, we have made significant progress in securing parity of esteem. We have engaged with leadership in Government and NHS England, worked closely with other key stakeholders such as the Mental Health Policy Group, amplified our message online, in the media and in parliament, and held the system to account by scrutinising data and performance.

Through this determined campaigning and influencing, we have played a critical role in ensuring that mental health is seen as equal to physical health. We endorse the recommendation that the National Audit Office (NAO) has made for the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England (NHSE) to publish a detailed statement setting out what achieving full 'parity of esteem' means in England. We strongly believe that this must be done in consultation with those with lived experience of mental illness, as well as carers, health and social care professionals, providers, commissioners and other key stakeholders. With this foundation, it is also

important that a detailed roadmap is provided for national bodies, Integrated Care Boards and local providers to achieve parity of esteem.

Secondly, I was very pleased to be able to join the American Psychiatric Association's Convention earlier this year in San Francisco. The theme of this year's meeting mirrored these values - it was about innovation, collaboration and motivation and how psychiatry across the world will chart the future of mental health. I had the privilege of talking about some of the amazing work that we are doing and will continue to do, to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

I am extremely proud of the progress we have made in the College's three-year Equality Action Plan which was launched in January 2021. While I depart office before the plan's conclusion, I want to take this opportunity to highlight some of the amazing work that we have done when carrying out the 29 key actions that have meant we take steps towards the College becoming a proactive anti-discrimination organisation.

We ran the biggest survey by any medical college to look at the extent to which LGBTQ+ doctors face discrimination in a specific specialty. We promoted a set of actions for trusts and boards to take in order to reduce the gender pay gap. We have also just launched the Act Against Racism campaign. Despite my time as President coming to an end, I strongly encourage you to sign-up to this campaign's 15-point action plan to tackle racism in the workplace at a strategic and systemic level.

Thirdly, I have seen some fantastic initiatives to support our workforce so that they can continue to do what they do best and help those in need. I must emphasise that every doctor working in psychiatry should feel safe, valued and able to thrive at work.

The work of our Wellbeing Committee, alongside our revamped Wellbeing Hub, are cornerstones of the way that we support our members and staff. They enable us to provide resources for doctors in difficulty and signpost to a range of other organisations and resources for support.

We recognise the value that peer to peer support has, so I am glad that, with our new Associate Registrar for Coaching and Mentoring, Dr Jaya Balakrishna, we have strengthened this offer. I also want to recognise the work of the 9 Wellbeing Champions that we have appointed across the UK, who provide the crucial link between the College and individual Trusts on factors that impact the wellbeing of psychiatrists.

Alongside this, the Psychiatrists Support Service (PSS) is there to provide free, rapid, high quality peer support by telephone to psychiatrists of all grades who may be experiencing personal or work-related difficulties. The service is totally confidential and delivered by trained Peer Support Psychiatrists (College Members).

I also recognise the importance of recruitment and retention in ensuring that we have a strong and resilient workforce. Throughout my presidency, we have consistently achieved 100% fill rate in national recruitment to Core Training posts and have seen improving fill rates at Higher Specialty level.

A few weeks ago I was invited to Number 10 Downing Street to discuss the release of the NHS Workforce Plan with the Prime Minister. We worked hard to secure publication of the plan – as well as some of the commitments in it – collaborating, evidencing, and campaigning at almost every opportunity. The £2.4bn investment in our workforce provides an important framework for future-proofing mental health services. This is the first plan of its kind in the history of the NHS. I am confident in the College's ability to continue working with NHS England and Government on the implementation of this significant expansion of the workforce.

We also developed the Startwell guidance for new consultants and have published the Startwell, Staywell guidance for Specialty and Specialist (SAS) Doctors earlier this year. On this note, I do want to pay a special tribute to our SAS doctor colleagues, and the Chair of the College Committee, Dr Lily Read, for the invaluable contribution they make to our organisation and the care that they provide to our patients.

I urge you to make use of these services and resources if needed to take care of your wellbeing, because you, the members, are at the heart of everything that we do.

Fourthly, it was with great pride that in October 2022, I found out that as part of a cross-sectional survey examining health organisations sustainability credentials, the Royal College of Psychiatrists was named as second in the leaderboard of 28 other UK health organisations in terms of the action it has taken.

Following the publication of the College's position statement on the climate and ecological emergency in 2021, we have been working with partner organisations to influence decision makers, such as the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change. It has been very pleasing to see the increasing attention being paid to this issue, such as last year's special publication of the International Review of Psychiatry, which focused on the climate crisis and mental health. I spoke about how keeping patients well is one of the most sustainable things we can do as psychiatrists. With the right resources, we have the power to detect and treat illness early, or even halt or slow their progress, which in turn can prevent deterioration to the point of needing hospitalisation. The links between sustainability and prevention are undeniable.

All this work would not happen without the passion and dedication of members, and I would like to pay a special tribute to Dr Lisa Page and Dr Jacob Krzanowski, our Associate Registrars for Sustainability, for their enormous efforts on this critical issue.

Across the four nations of the UK, we have had real influence. In Wales, we came together with the NHS Welsh Confederation to call for all parties in the Senedd to take urgent action to address health inequalities. In Scotland, we have been comprehensively engaged across a range of areas, including the recently published Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. In Northern Ireland we have continued key influencing of the Workforce review and Outcomes framework work flowing from the newly published Mental Health Strategy.

Beyond the UK, our International Division has continued to play an essential role in mental health around the world, developing the Emergency Response plan to respond

to international crisis in support of colleagues and affected populations. This has been adopted by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges as good example of responding to manmade and natural disasters, and has been used for different crisis in countries like India, Ukraine, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Sudan.

As I come to the end of my tenure, I must thank our Officers – Dr Trudi Seneviratne OBE, Professor Subodh Dave and Professor John Crichton. It has been a fantastic experience to work with you. Thank you also to Dr Jan Falkowski and Dr Kate Lovett, for your work as Officers, during my first year as President.

I want to thank all my Presidential Leads for their dedication to their roles this year. Many of the College's biggest achievements could not have happened without their support.

My thanks also to our Chief Executive, Paul Rees MBE for his continued support over the past year and over my entire tenure.

The College has continued to go from strength to strength in its support for members; in influencing stakeholders to improve the lives of people with mental illness; in raising standards in mental health services; in training the future generation of psychiatrists; and in being the voice of psychiatry.

It feels fitting that I close this chapter of my life by giving my heartfelt thanks to all our members, who make the College the incredible organisation that it is. It has been a pleasure to represent you all over the last three years and I will be forever grateful for your support.

Dr Adrian James, President