This is the first newsletter of the Arts Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Thank you all for writing in to support the founding of the Arts SIG. We were pleasantly surprised by how many people expressed their interest, and we now have several hundred members. We held the inaugural meeting in October 2015, officially establishing the SIG. Since then we’ve been trying to work out how best to progress and develop the group’s activities.

OUR MAIN AIMS:

Provide a Forum for Collaboration and The Exchange of Ideas
We are aware that several disciplines – from the art therapies to art criticism and psychotherapy – have specific expertise in the arts, and we want the College to add to this wealth of expertise, in what is a rapidly growing field. We have been struck by the number of events, articles and generally increased awareness of the role of the arts in wellbeing. For example, last month, the Changing Minds Festival at the South Bank Centre was fully booked. There was considerable enthusiasm expressed by participating organisations in working with the College.

Increase understanding of Arts Therapies
Through our training we have been made aware of the various therapies linked to the arts, which involve engaging individuals in the creative process, as a means of expressing or processing mental distress and helping in the treatment of disorders.

Promote Art as Therapy
We also strongly believe in the direct therapeutic effects of the artistic experience and creativity itself, separate from the formal therapies, in improving our own sense of wellbeing. However, it is well documented that, at least in this country, those disadvantaged due to poverty or illness, for example, have less access to the arts. An awareness of the therapeutic effects of art will allow arguments for greater access; we therefore welcome any feedback, examples or studies of those who have benefitted from experiencing the arts.

The authentic portrayal of Mental States
The accurate representation of mental disorders can help combat stigma through greater understanding of the reality of the condition, as well as stimulating discussion and awareness. The misrepresentation of mental disorders produces much hurt, discrimination and alienation. Artworks that accurately reflect mental states, can also be therapeutic, helping us feel heard and understood.
INITIAL PLAN:

We are seeking articles of any relevance – including personal experience - on how the arts and involvement with them can help mental disorders. We hope to build a resource to learn about current evidence and practice within the UK.

We hope to inform ArtSIG members of any relevant artistic events that may be of interest and would be grateful for any information you may be able to provide.

We will establish a presence on the Royal College website and utilise the support offered by the College media team to inform you of new content including plans for a podcast and SIG meetings.

Thank you.

TBS Balamurali & Peter MacRae
ArtSIG Chairs