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Handwritten notes and sketches, including a tree diagram and the words "Evolutionary Psychiatry".

Evolutionary
Psychiatry
Special Interest Group



ANNUAL CONFERENCE



6TH NOVEMBER 2026

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS
LONDON





Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group (EPSIG)



Contacts

EDITOR: Dr Paul StJohn-Smith
(Consultant Psychiatrist)
paulstjohnsmith@hotmail.com

ASSISTANT EDITORS:
Dr Costa Savva, Core Trainee
Dr Sirous Golchinheydari, ST
Dr Manikandan Dhanabhal, Core Trainee
Dr Scarlett Marshall, LED

EPSIG CHAIR: Dr Riadh Abed (Consultant Psychiatrist)
abedrt@btinternet.com

FINANCE OFFICER: Dr Annie Swanepoel
(Consultant CAMHS Psychiatrist)
annie.panzer@gmail.com

EPSIG Website: www.epsig.org

EPSIG Youtube Channel:
www.youtube.com/@EPSIGUK/videos

Notes from the Editor

As you already know, this is our 10th anniversary year and a record number of evolutionary articles have been published in Europe. We are also celebrating with other events and articles. We have a fabulous 10th anniversary conference booked for November (6th) at the RCPsych, with some of the biggest names in Evolutionary Psychiatry: Randolph Nesse is coming over from the States and Martin Brüne from Germany to speak with us. This is the last call for the essay prize; details below and we have an AGM online on September 18th .

AGM

Friday Sept 18th 2026 2pm via Zoom. All are welcome. Join us by contacting Gareth at the college requesting the Zoom link for the AGM on: sigs@rcpsych.ac.uk

EPSIG-Ireland

The Evolution & Psychiatry Special Interest Group (EPSIG) in Ireland continues to grow, with Gurjot Brar recently appointed as Chair. Current efforts focus on a series of projects in medical education, alongside Henry O'Connell's ongoing delivery of evolutionary psychiatry tutorials to medical students throughout the year. Our meetings are well attended and feature a keynote talk by an evolutionist 2-3 times a year. They have submitted a proposal for a symposium at the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland winter 2026 meeting U.K. colleagues are very welcome to attend.

Details of titles and FREE registration links can be found on:
<https://www.wpanet.org/section-page/evolutionary-psychiatry/>

Future Events

The 8th International EPSIG Symposium F2F 6 November 2026 at the Royal College
Speakers: Randolph Nesse, Martin Brüne, Anne-Laure Le Cunff, Penny Spikins, Laurence Hurst, Paul Keedwell (Chairs: Paul St John-Smith and Annie Swanepoel). This will be followed by post-conference dinner (Limited places for the dinner. Those interested should contact Riadh Abed on email above).

Full Symposium Program and Registration Link:

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/events/conferences/detail/2026/11/06/default-calendar/8th-international-evolutionary-psychiatry-sig-symposium>



8th International Symposium: EPSIG

Conference Programme



8th International Symposium: Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group (EPSIG)



Date: Friday 6 November 2026
Venue: In-person at the RCPsych London Headquarters

Time	Session
9.00am	Registration
9.30am	Welcome and introduction Dr Riadh Abed, EPSIG Chair
Plenary 1	
9.40am	Chair: Paul St John-Smith The allostatic cliff edge: An evolutionary mismatch theory of mental disorders Dr Paul Keedwell Consultant Psychiatrist, Lewisham Low Intensity Support Team, UK
10.20am	Hypercuriosity: An evolutionary theory of ADHD Dr Anne-Laure Le Cunff King's College London, UK
11.05am	Q & A
11.25am	Refreshment break
Plenary 2	
11.55am	Chair: Paul St John-Smith Why all psychiatry is not evolutionary psychiatry...yet! Professor Randolph Nesse Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Arizona State University and University of Michigan
12.40pm	Q & A
12.50pm	Charles Darwin Essay Prize winner presentation – Higher Resident:
1.00pm	Lunch
Plenary 3	
2.00pm	Chair: Annie Swanepoel Charles Darwin Essay Prize winner presentation – Core Resident:

8th International Symposium: EPSIG

Conference Programme



8th International Symposium: Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group (EPSIG)



Date: Friday 6 November 2026

Venue: In-person at the RCPsych London Headquarters

2.10pm	The evolution of imperfection: the science of why we aren't and can't be perfect Professor Laurence Hurst University of Bath, UK
2.55pm	Q & A
3.05pm	Refreshment break
Plenary 4	
3.35pm	Chair: Annie Swanepoel
	Evolution of music: playing off the beat in psychotherapy Professor Martin Bruene Ruhr University Bochum, Germany
4.20pm	Q & A
4.30pm	Cowering in Caves? How the archaeological record can contribute to our understanding of modern anxiety Professor Penny Spikins University of York
5.15pm	Q & A
5.25pm	Closing comments Dr Riadh Abed, EPSIG Chair
5.35pm	End of conference

The RCPsych is an inclusive organisation with over 21,000 members who have a diverse range of views, which we look to represent across the programme. To further open dialogue, scientific discovery and enrich learning, we provide our members with the opportunity to hear from a

8th International Symposium: EPSIG

Speaker's Bios



Martin Brune: Martin Brüne is Professor of Psychiatry and Head of the Division of Social Neuropsychiatry and Evolutionary Medicine at the LWL University-Hospital, Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany. Dr Brüne has authored more than 300 articles and book chapters. He has also authored the Textbook of Evolutionary Psychiatry and Psychosomatic Medicine: The Origins of Psychopathology (2nd edn. Oxford University Press, 2016). He served as the Editor (together with Prof. Wulf Schiefenhövel) of The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Medicine (Oxford University Press, 2019), and as a Co-Editor of The Evolutionary Roots of Human Brain Diseases (Oxford University Press, 2024). Dr Brüne is a member of several psychiatric and neuroscientific societies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie, Psychotherapie und Nervenheilkunde (DGPPN), International Society for Human Ethology (ISHE), Gesellschaft für Anthropologie (GfA), and the International Graduate School of Neuroscience (IGSN), Ruhr-University Bochum.

Laurence Hurst: Laurence Hurst is Professor of Evolutionary Genetics at The Centre For Evolution, University of Bath UK, of which he was the Founding Director. He works on fundamental problems in the evolution of genetic systems often with application to medicine. He was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences (FMedSci) and a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) in 2015. He was a recipient of the Humboldt Prize (2024), the VC Research Medal (2015), the Scientific Medal of the Zoological Society of London (2003), the Darwin Award of the BA (2000) and was elected a member of European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) in 2004. He was awarded The Genetics Society Medal in 2010 and was its President from 2018-2021. Aside from being on the editorial board of multiple journals, he is on the Scientific Advisory Board of ExpressionEdits and the Advisory Board of PlosB. He is the author of one book, The Evolution of Imperfection (Princeton University Press 2025), an attempt to synthesise why humans are particularly genetically challenged.

Paul Keedwell: Dr Paul Keedwell is a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists with a longstanding interest in evolutionary psychiatry and the neuroscience of mood disorders. He trained at the Maudsley Hospital and Institute of Psychiatry in London, completed his PhD in the neurobiology of depression at King's College London in 2010, and conducted neuroimaging research at Cardiff University, where he held a senior academic post. His first book, How Sadness Survived (2008), examined low mood, grief and depression through an evolutionary lens. His second, Headspace (2017), applied evolutionary and psychological principles to the built environment, exploring the biophilia hypothesis and the radical mismatch between the cities we have constructed and the environment in which we evolved. His forthcoming book, Disconnected, to be published by Cambridge University Press early next year, extends this argument across the full breadth of human social life - from the collapse of communal support and alloparenting to the rise of digital disruptors - making the case that most psychiatric disorder is a predictable consequence of asking a deeply prosocial species to function in an increasingly competitive, atomised and unequal world.

8th International Symposium: EPSIG

Speaker's Bios



Ann-Laure Le Cunff: Dr Anne-Laure Le Cunff is a UKRI-funded neuroscientist at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. Her research in the ADHD Research Lab focuses on the neurodevelopmental and evolutionary basis of hypercuriosity. She holds a PhD in Psychology and Neuroscience and an MSc in Applied Neuroscience, both from King's College London. Beyond academia, Dr Le Cunff is the founder of Ness Labs, an educational platform that teaches knowledge workers how to apply an experimental mindset to support creativity, productivity, and mental health at work. She is the author of *Tiny Experiments* (Penguin Random House, 2025) and previously worked on Google's digital health team.

Randolph Nesse: Randolph M. Nesse, MD is Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Michigan where he led the residency training program and helped to develop one of the country's first Anxiety Disorders Clinics, while leading the university's Evolution and Human Adaptation Program for 15 years. In 2014 he founded the Center for Evolution Medicine at Arizona State University where he continues as a Research Professor after retiring from teaching. His research on evolution and aging led to a collaboration with the evolutionary biologist George Williams that initiated new work in evolutionary medicine. His current mission is to show how the principles of evolutionary medicine can strengthen the scientific foundation for psychiatry. He is a Fellow of the AAAS, a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, and a Fellow of the Society for Psychological Science. He founded the Human Behavior and Evolution Society in 1988 and the International Society for Evolution, Medicine & Public Health in 2014. His recent book, *Good Reasons for Bad Feelings: Insights from the Frontier of Evolutionary Psychiatry* has been described as seminal for evolutionary psychiatry.

Penny Spikins: Penny is Professor of the Archaeology of Human Origins at the University of York. Her research particularly focuses on how archaeological evidence can contribute to our understanding of human social and emotional dynamics. She has published several books and many articles in this field, including concerning the evolution of neurodiversity (particularly autism), attachments to objects, care for the vulnerable, and trust and emotional commitments. Penny's latest book, *'Hidden Depths: The origins of human connection'* (White Rose University Press, open access) builds on her previous volume *'How Compassion Made Us Human'* (Pen and Sword) in arguing that a selection for pro-social emotional motivations has been the driving force behind human evolution. She particularly explores how at each stage in our evolutionary past changes which lead to human success came alongside new sensitivities and vulnerabilities and how this understanding changes our view of ourselves.

Other Events

Collaboration with EP section at WPA

WPA EP Section webinar Program: to be arranged .

<https://www.wpanet.org/section-page/evolutionary-psychiatry/>

2026 Compassion-Focused Therapy Conference:



This year's theme, '**Compassion in Action**' will feature research and clinical practice that shows how we can put the wisdom and practice of compassion into action with each day focusing on a different perspective, reflecting our biopsychosocial approach.

As The Compassionate Mind Foundation also reaches its 20th anniversary this year, we will be celebrating our community and the developments in CFT from around the world, making this year's conference especially meaningful.

For further information and registration please contact:

Lesley Lewis – lesley.lewis@compassionatemind.co.uk

Bekah Smith – bekah.smith@compassionatemind.co.uk

Charles Darwin RCPsych EPSIG Prize 2026

Do you want to be invited to speak at an international conference?

If you are a Psychiatry core or specialty trainee, medical student or non-consultant grade psychiatrist in the UK, you are eligible to enter this Essay Competition. Two winners will be invited to speak for 10 minutes each at the in-person EPSIG International Symposium on **6th November 2026** at the RCPsych in London.

The essay submissions must be the applicant's own intellectual contribution. Originality will be valued.

Medical students, foundation doctors and staff grade doctors are all eligible to apply in their own categories with the prizes as below:

What you can win:

Invitation to give a 10-min oral presentation at the EPSIG International conference held in person on **6th November 2026** for the psychiatry core and specialty trainee winners only.

£100 pound prize money for the winner each of five categories (medical student, foundation doctor, core trainee, specialty trainee, staff-grade doctor)

Certificate for the runner-up in each of the above five categories

Winners will have their essay printed in the EPSIG Newsletter that is distributed to all EPSIG members (currently over 3000 psychiatrists and other professionals worldwide)

What you need to do:

Write a 1500 to 2000-word essay (excluding references) relevant to Evolutionary Psychiatry. The essay should be supported by a review of relevant literature and must be your own intellectual work.

The title is: **"How an evolutionary perspective can improve our understanding of ... (anything to do with psychiatry)"**.

You may want to visit the EPSIG [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/EPSIGUK) at Youtube.com/EPSIGUK, listen to the 'Evolving Psychiatry' podcast (on [all major platforms](#)), or read our published newsletters at [epsig.org](https://www.epsig.org) for inspiration and information.

Email your submission to sigs@rcpsych.ac.uk with "Entry for EPSIG Essay prize" as title by **1st September 2026**.

What we will do:

Entries will be judged by a panel of three EPSIG Executive Committee members. Criteria for judging will include clarity of expression, understanding of the evolutionary literature and evidence, critical thinking and the overall ability to convey enthusiasm and originality. The committee reserves the right not to award the prize if no entry reaching the agreed minimum standard is received. Winners and highly commended other entrants will be informed by 15 October 2026.

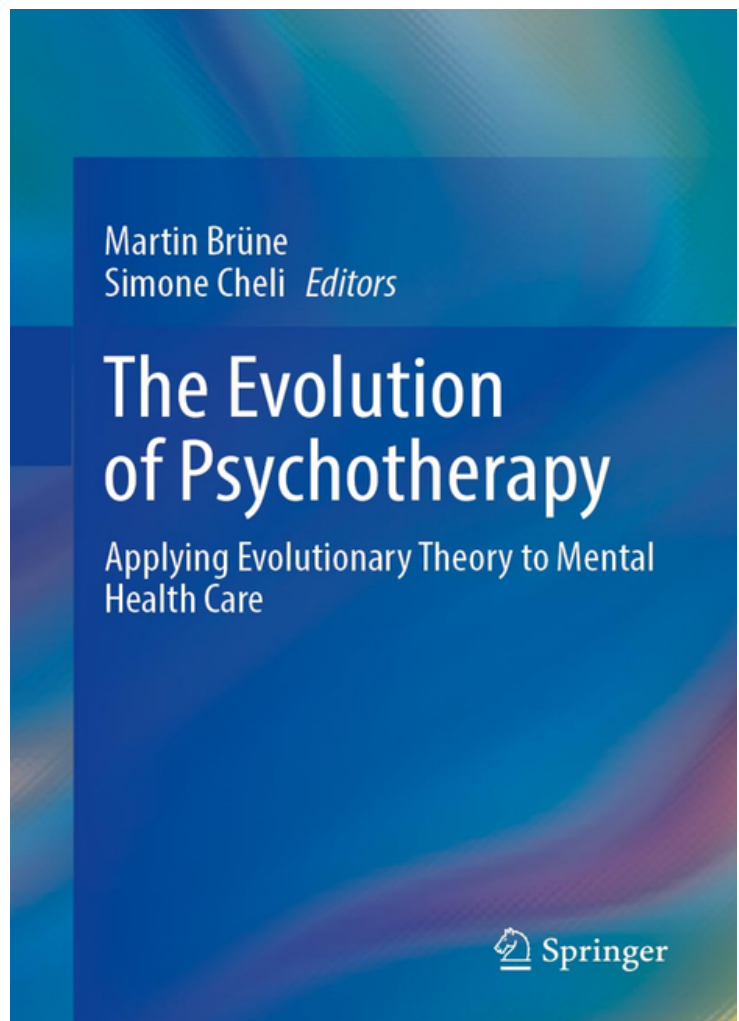
Major New Book Out!

The Evolution of Psychotherapy: Applying Evolutionary Theory to Mental Health Care

Martin Brüne
Simone Cheli

This newly published edited volume is a timely and authoritative addition to the evolutionary psychiatry literature by two eminent, practicing evolutionary psychotherapists. The volume consists of 19 chapters by a range of authors tackling very diverse subjects that are hard to find elsewhere in a single volume. The editors have succeeded in including an outstanding line-up of evolutionary authors who are pioneers in various kinds of evolutionary-inspired psychotherapy. The book should be required reading for evolutionary psychiatrists (both beginners and experts). Unfortunately, the price of the hardback is rather prohibitive and there is currently no kindle version on Amazon. However, those with access to university libraries may be able to read it in electronic form. Also, it is hoped that lower-priced versions will become available in due course.

Dr Riadh Abed



Hope to see you all on 6 November at the college!

Paul St John Smith (Ed)