

Briefings

IX World Congress of Psychiatry*

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The President of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), Dr Jorge Costa de Silva, being Brazilian, this congress was the first to be held south of the equator and in a local winter. The choice of venue caused more than usual anticipatory anxiety because Rio, the largest of all tropical cities, accommodating ten million people who unify by calling themselves Cariocas but whose economic welfare is widely disparate, has a reputation for mugging rather than begging. In the event delegates were made so security conscious and the city administrators allocated so many hundreds of police to prevent trouble that there were only three or four materially untoward incidents. One story is that a delegate ventured to the beach wearing bathing trunks and sun glasses and returned with neither.

The police were nearly all armed and came in various grades from the military, whose emblem was crossed revolvers, to young ladies in high-heeled shoes and un-uniformed personnel. Some of them leading fierce dogs, they quietly made their presence felt around hotels where delegates were staying and in the conference centre.

This centre, the Rio Centro, is an enormous two-storied structure with a curious external metal criss-crossing frame, suspended from the roof, that made it look unfinished. It is in pleasant country but 40 km from delegates' hotels. Congress buses, running quite frequently but calling at many if not all of the hotels, took an hour over a single journey through streets festooned with conference banners.

There were some 3,000 participants, excluding accompanying partners, from more than 90 countries, comparable figures for Athens in 1989 having been 5,000 and 64. This time only three or four came from Russia.

At an opening ceremony, mainly unintelligible to non-speakers of Portuguese, because those attending had not been warned to equip themselves with headphones to receive translation, Dr Costa de Silva thanked the pharmaceutical industry for support. There seemed to be more powerful commercial elements than ever in sponsoring very many dele-

gates, exerting pressure from spacious eye and ear catching stands, and organising, advertising and reporting symposia in which there was a promotional component.

At the other extreme there were sessions on such purely intellectual topics as philosophy, the concept of disease, "bioethics", which deliberated on "new lines of thought" on doctor-patient sexual relationships. "Psycho-oncology" and the placebo effect featured among many psychotherapeutic topics. According to the programme for a symposium on Delusional Misidentification Syndrome our president was "Sims, Andrew (Greece)", his nationality having apparently been absorbed into that of the chairman, Professor George Christodoulou.

In the main auditorium, seating 2,600, all conditions were excellent except that the slide presentations were illegible from the back, but the 22 other conference rooms were bleak, nightmarishly contaminated by noises of buses, proceedings in adjoining rooms and broadcasting announcements, and bedevilled by poor displays of videotape recordings and shortages of microphones and overhead projectors. Attendance at many of the sessions was very scanty, particularly towards the end of the congress.

Among some 300 sessions of various kinds, an innovation was a daily conference on a Brazilian patient. Here young Brazilian psychiatrists presented the history and findings, summarising them in terms of the latest American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, all adequately except for an omission of the premonitory personality. A videotape recording of an interview with the patient appeared on a monitor and three or four experts from different countries discussed the formulation and treatment, all in English of varying quality. One of the patients was a manipulative anorexic and another a young man who took cannabis and developed an apparently typical schizophrenia. The patients' consultant psychiatrists and the experts added zest to the occasion by giving different opinions but took so long in their discussions that there was very little time for audience participation. However, the experiment was very interesting and with improvements in format and technique these conferences could be attractive and instructive.

*Held in Rio de Janeiro from 6–12 June 1993.

An interesting plenary session on panic featured without clear disapproval a particular benzodiazepine, and indeed throughout the congress reluctance to prescribe benzodiazepines appeared to be relatively slight in countries other than the United Kingdom. One of the symposia was about the problems and controversies surrounding these tranquillisers. As a counterblast to the inhibitors, all of which were much in evidence, of serotonin and monoamine oxidase, there was a resurrection of mianserin.

In a symposium quaintly entitled 'The Rights of the Mental Patient before the 21st Century' Dr F. Torres-Gonzalez of Granada described deaths from malnutrition in underdeveloped countries of vast numbers of children and adolescents. He asked, if mentally healthy people in these countries had no rights, "What insecurities are waiting for the mentally ill patient?" Perhaps owing to a reluctance by the local psychiatrists to reveal what was at best a paucity of information about psychiatry in Rio, one could not find out much about the mental health of the city, although one or two of the delegates at the meeting succeeded in visiting the city's general mental hospital, named after Philippe Pinel, and the forensic psychiatric hospital. They came back with gruesome accounts. Delegates were discouraged from going near the shantytowns, called *favelas*, but passed close to them in their buses and saw some of their horror. Many of the shacks have been replaced by brick and concrete buildings and on the hillside from a distance they look quite pleasant but few of them have a direct water supply or rubbish collection and none has sewerage. A sadly incongruous sight was a child climbing into a box-like structure for a night's sleep on the pavement outside a smart seafront hotel.

One speaker at the symposium on patients' rights said that the WPA's General Assembly had convened a day or two previously and directed interest towards Bosnia and Slovenia with a hope of reduction of "manslaughtering and racial cleansing" by intervention other than military. The assembly implemented one such intervention by censoring Radovan Karadzic, a psychiatrist who was the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, although this action was contrary to the anti-Muslim sentiments of the Greeks. However, the conflict about the abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union having subsided, the atmosphere in the assembly was mainly amicable. Professor Felice Lieh-Mak of Hong Kong assumed the presidency at this congress and the next World Congress is to be held in Beijing. The assembly elected as her successor the World Health Organisation's Professor Norman Sartorius, foreseeing that for the next eight years the presidents would be Fellows of our College.

After the catering débâcle in Athens the organisers made little attempt to feed their delegates, who could in unseemly struggles exchange a coupon for a dry and tasteless sandwich and a small cup of sweet coffee from a counter arranged in a peculiar irregular square containing a few very harassed ladies. Perhaps the organisers knew that the pharmaceutical companies would provide a few lunches. A Farewell Dinner at a luxurious hotel on the coast cost US \$70 per person for buffet service but the evening, enlivened by a dance band and young people demonstrating extremely attractive Brazilian jewellery, was very pleasant. Eating in barbecue style with a huge variety of side dishes in Rio's restaurants was marvellous and not too expensive.

The esplanades at Copacabana and Ipanema beaches had fascinating large black and white mosaic patterns. On the beaches people were walking and playing games, notably soccer with volley ball rules, the Cariocas being fanatic about both games and having reputedly the largest soccer stadium in the world, but hardly anybody went into the sea, apparently because of pollution, currents and winds in the winter season. On a promontory at the South of Copacabana was a fort, built with Cariocan insouciance, which was everywhere in evidence, for protection against no particular enemy. Its approaches displayed a great collection of European and American field artillery dating from the years before World War I. From the fort was a wonderful view across Copacabana Bay to the granite cone of Sugar Loaf Mountain.

Despite the puzzles of a currency featuring millions of cruzeiros and cruzados in an unpredictable exchange rate, for a few pounds and a multi-tiered taxi system, one could traverse the city through tunnels under mountains rising sheer a few feet away from houses to ascend a mountain called Corcovado, meaning hunchback, in an electric train through a forest to reach a statue, 38 m high, of Christ but on this occasion torrential rain made it almost invisible. Sixty-five km to the north and 840 m high was Petrópolis, which the Emperor Pedro II built in the last century as a resort from the summer heat of Rio. Among some lovely pink buildings, including a palace not unlike English stately homes, was a strange abode on a steep hillside where lived Alberto Santos Dumont, whom many believed to have invented the aeroplane but who killed himself because he despaired over its use for war.

WPA world congresses have their shortcomings but at least provide a forum for international discourse and an opportunity for psychiatrists from underdeveloped countries to present their findings. Rio succeeded! All the organisers breathed a great sigh of relief and deserve our congratulations and thanks. These gatherings are likely to continue popular.