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Progress in the development of the International Divisions

The end of 2006 showed tangible signs that the International Divisions of the College are making significant developmental strides. This follows on from the filling of the places on their executive committees and perhaps also is a result of the discussions and networking that take place at the College's annual meetings (with their increasing international participation), witnessed by the good attendance at all the Divisions' presentations in Glasgow in June last year.

The informative annual reports for 2006 outlined the Divisions' programmes for the forthcoming year. Educational and local training events and meetings are being planned, all suggesting that the rejuvenation of College international activity through the Board of International Affairs is starting to have an effect 'on the ground' and that local College members of International Divisions are increasingly taking initiatives.

The first newsletter of an International Division

The African International Division is the first to produce a newsletter, thanks to the editorship and enthusiasm of the Division's Secretary, Femi Olubile. Electronic copies of the newsletter can be obtained from femi_olugbile@yahoo.com. The newsletter outlines the current contextual issues of the Division, leading to the development plans that follow on from that context. College meetings in the UK have been a unifying and important rallying point but now the newsletter will also have that function, as well as the meeting of the Division within the much awaited Regional Conference of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) in Nairobi in March 2007. College Division members are playing a leading part in the conference as they did in their editorship of the two major new textbooks on psychiatry in Africa, as reported in the October issue of *International Psychiatry* (vol. 3, no. 4, p. 18).

Middle East news

The long-held plans for a Middle East International Division conference in Beirut have had to be postponed because of the outbreak of hostilities and ongoing insecurity. Alternative plans are being made. There will be a symposium on Iraq's mental health services during the College's June Edinburgh meeting and the Iraq sub-committee of the Board of International Affairs is developing plans to support mental health initiatives in the Kurdistan part of Iraq.

The MRCPsych and Hong Kong

Hong Kong, which is in the Western Pacific International Division, is currently the only site outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland where it is possible to sit the MRCPsych examination. About 80 candidates take the exam each year

and a high pass rate is achieved. Recent discussions at the Board of International Affairs have led to the recommendation that International Divisions have a trainee representative, and perhaps the Western Pacific is best placed to initiate this.

Resilience and recovery from the psychosocial consequences of disasters: a training module

Professor David Alexander, Director of the Aberdeen Trauma Research Centre at the Robert Gordon University, and Professor Richard Williams, Professor of Mental Health Strategy at the University of Glamorgan, will run a pilot workshop on this training module at the College annual meeting on Friday 22 June (9.45–17.30).

The growth of communications technology enables us to 'experience' catastrophic natural disasters, conflict and war from the safety of our own homes. It also provides a flexible infrastructure for implementing the virtual organisations that are favoured by terrorists. But several recent large-scale natural disasters and terrorist attacks stand out in our recent experience and few of us are not now sensitised to potential risks around us.

Unsurprisingly, in this context, attention has turned increasingly to the psychological impacts of natural and human-created disasters in the short span of the 21st century. Although mental health practitioners have, for a very long time, contributed to promoting the resilience of populations to disasters of all kinds and to promoting recovery after catastrophic events, interest in the knowledge and skills that are required to be effective practitioners has risen dramatically in the past decade.

In this context, the College has formed a group to recommend a curriculum for developing the skills and knowledge of mental health practitioners so that they may better understand what is required during and after disasters to aid the resilience and recovery of those affected, by enabling practitioners to make effective psychosocial interventions. As a part of this work, the group has designed a modular approach to the delivery of training and the workshop will offer a trial run of the basic module. It will provide those attending the annual meeting with the opportunity to sample the course, with a view to learning from it and also critiquing it to help the College improve the contents.

The College at the American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting

The annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association will take place in San Diego in May 2007. The College

is expected to be very strongly represented at this meeting, with many joint activities.

College reception

The Pan-American International Division will host the Royal College of Psychiatrists' reception at the meeting. This will be on Monday 21 May 2007, 18.30–20.30, at the Omni Hotel, 657 L Street (one block from the Convention Center) on the Palm and Sail Terrace – Level 6. All Members, Fellows, International Associates and friends of the College are invited and encouraged to come.

International symposium

The College's International Symposium, organised by the Pan-American International Division, entitled 'Women and psychiatry around the world: the importance of gender and culture', will be on Tuesday 22 May, 14.00–17.00, in Room 28 D/E, Upper Level, San Diego Convention Center. Speakers will be from Pakistan, Egypt, Kenya, Mexico, Trinidad and Australia.

Joint Presidential Symposium

There will be a Joint Presidential Symposium of the College and the American Psychiatric Association (co-chairs Sheila Hollins and Pedro Ruiz) entitled 'Health inequalities for persons with mental health problems and developmental disabilities', which will have speakers from each organisation, on Wednesday 23 May, 14.00–17.00, in Ballroom 6D, Upper Level, San Diego Convention Center.

Nigel Bark, Chair, Pan-American International Division

Fountain House

Fountain House is one of the best-known public mental health institutions in Pakistan, if not in Asia. Situated in Lahore, it has just had its 35th anniversary celebrations. A number of distinguished guest speakers will be visiting Fountain House this year and a number of presentations have been made at College meetings. It is funded from charitable sources and is located close enough to the earthquake disaster to have developed worrying cracks in its buildings. Staff have been very active in giving assistance to earthquake victims. UK fundraisers recently gave a cheque for a substantial sum to assist the rehabilitation of earthquake victims with mental health problems.

Fountain House has an agricultural therapeutic community 1 hour away from the city centre, which takes patients with psychosis, learning difficulties and heroin addiction; the community achieves excellent results, akin to those found in other low- and middle-income countries, and superior to those achieved with Western biology-oriented approaches.

Fountain House has an active educational programme and welcomes lecturers and visitors. The current director (and son of the founder) is Professor Haroon Rashid Chaudry. Fountain House can be contacted by email (fountain_house1971@yahoo.com).

News from the WPA

All members of the College are automatically members of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) as a result of the College's institutional membership. Up-to-date information about WPA activities is available on <http://www.wpanet.org>.

The WPA's high-quality journal, *World Psychiatry*, reaches 32 000 psychiatrists and has recently been accepted by PubMed, Current Contents and the Science Citation Index. It is sent free to those psychiatrists whose names and addresses are supplied by WPA member societies and sections, and is also available free on the WPA website.

The WPA is currently going through a period of considerable activity. Two new task forces, Brain Drain and Psychiatric Manpower, and Mass Violence and Mental Health, have been set up in addition to a host of existing projects.

Efforts are being directed at adapting the WPA's own institutional procedures so that they will correspond more appropriately to the extensive development of WPA activities in the past decade, including procedures for nominations and elections. The Permanent Secretariat in Geneva continues to develop and the WPA is achieving greater financial security through corporate supporters and other sources of income.

News from the UEMS

On 1 January 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union (EU). As a consequence, these two countries endorsed EU legislation, including the provisions regulating the free movement of health professionals. Holders of qualifications from these member states must hence be recognised in other EU countries. A specific Directive was adopted in December 2006 (2006/100/EC) to set out the basic requirements for different medical specialties. This enlargement naturally also applies within the structure of the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS), and Bulgaria and Romania were upgraded to the status of full members at the Council meeting in March this year.

The contribution of the UEMS to the European Commission's consultation on patient mobility and cross-border care was the main focus in December and January. A particular tribute must be paid to the UEMS sections and boards for their constructive comments and enthusiastic support. The Commission is now expected to release a formal initiative later this year after having examined all the stakeholders' responses. The entry into force of the Professional Qualifications Directive in October 2007 will undoubtedly be the other major European project on which the UEMS will be very active.

The UEMS will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year. The Executive has set up a new working group to find ways of improving the Union's overall functioning. The UEMS general strategy for the next few years is being developed in an effort to streamline its action in the fields of interest to European specialists.

Further details of UEMS activities and publications are available on the website <http://www.uems.net/>.