

Mental handicap and mental health – the way ahead*

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This international conference was organised by the World Psychiatric Association's Section of Mental Retardation, and the Section of Psychiatry of Mental Handicap at Guy's Hospital. Speakers and participants from far flung corners of the world attended, representing the UK, USA and Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Japan, Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium and Zimbabwe. The participants included professionals, managers, and representatives of voluntary organisations.

The conference opened with a welcome by Dr Nick Bouras (UK), Professor Jim Watson (UK) and Dr Anton Dosen (Netherlands). A keynote address by Professor Frank Menolascino (USA) reflected on different international approaches to services for people with learning disabilities. Cultural diversity was also reflected in talks by UK and USA speakers looking at assessment and service provision. Dr Tony Holland (UK) gave a talk on Down's syndrome and Alzheimer's disease, pointing out the growing problem of the increasing survival to old age of people with learning disability due to improved care and the challenges they pose to the services.

A video and poster session ran in tandem. The poster session was diverse and well attended. The video session, something of a novelty at an international conference, consisted of brief documentaries by Japanese and Australian representatives about their respective services.

The second day opened with Professor John McGee (USA) talking about his controversial technique of 'gentle teaching'. This is a form of behavioural shaping emphasising 'social role valorisation' and avoiding punitive or aversive methods. Three

parallel seminars focused on the use and misuse of drugs, psychotherapy (including accounts of family therapy, individual and group psychoanalytic psychotherapy, sandplay therapy, and psychodynamic music therapy) and sexuality (including sexual abuse of adults and helping parents to cope with sexuality in their learning disabled child). It would seem that there is still a long way to go in improving our knowledge base about psychopharmacology and its applications in learning disability.

The afternoon ended with plenary sessions by American and Japanese speakers on pharmacotherapy, effectiveness of services, and dual diagnosis in adolescence. Three parallel seminar sessions followed. In the Fragile X seminar Dr Randi Hagerman (USA) gave a state of the art talk on Fragile X syndrome. The challenging behaviour seminar looked at the autistic continuum, and prevention management and intervention in sleep disturbance in learning disabled children. The group psychotherapy seminar included accounts of anger management and treating aggressive behaviours and sexual disorders in a group setting.

The final morning opened with an international selection. Dr Andrew Levitas (USA) spoke of the psychosocial development of people with learning disabilities. Professor Sam Sussman (Canada) spoke about dual diagnosis. Dr Jack Piachaud of Zimbabwe gave a very interesting account of the services in that country, quite a contrast to the material presented in other talks from the developed world.

Three UK speakers gave the closing sessions. Professor Chris Kiernan discussed the exciting possibilities for tomorrow's research, and Professor Joan Bicknell spoke movingly of her work with learning disabled young people. Finally Professor Jim Mansell spoke about the challenge of providing quality services.

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