



carers, many of whom are outraged at the quality of the services they have received. The College also needs to do much more to address the difficulties faced by its affiliates or non-consultant career grade doctors, some of whom have been at the receiving end of an invidious subtle form of indirect discrimination for most of their careers.

The BMA published a report in 2003 entitled *Racism in the Medical Profession: The Experience of UK Graduates*. This report looks at the experience and beliefs of one cohort of doctors in relation to racism. It shows that racism is widespread in the NHS and is experienced by doctors from minority ethnic groups that are UK-trained as well as those from overseas. It makes sober reading.

So, despite appearances to the contrary, the College, until recently, got off to a slow start in grappling with race equality issues, both within the College and in the wider community. This time round there must be a difference.

Council has approved an action plan that in due course will affect every area of College activity. The College, at the highest level, is committed to seeing real change. With the help of College members the Royal College of Psychiatrists can become a fine example of an institution which has honestly confronted its institutional racism and is beginning a journey which it hopes will end in the eradication of discrimination from its structures. This should lead to a real improvement in the care and treatment of some of our most vulnerable users – which is our real goal. We have started a far-reaching programme. A momentum has now built up which must not slow down.

**Parimala Moodley** Chair of Ethnic Issues Committee, **Vanessa Cameron** Chief Executive

## Proposal for a special interest group in approaches to conflict, trauma and disasters

Procedure for establishing a special interest group:

- (1) Any member wishing to establish a special interest group shall write to the Registrar with relevant details.
- (2) The Registrar shall forward the application to Council.
- (3) If Council approves the principle of establishing such a special interest group, then it will direct the Registrar to place a notice in the *Bulletin*, or its equivalent, asking members of the College to write in support of such a group and expressing willingness to participate in its activities.
- (4) If at least 120 members reply to this notice within 4 months of publication,

then Council shall formally approve the establishment of the special interest group.

In accordance with this procedure, Council has approved a proposal for the establishment of a special interest group in approaches to conflict, trauma and disasters.

## Background to the proposal from Dr Nathaniel Minton:

The proposal for the group was initially suggested to me by Professor Driss Moussaoui, Casablanca, Chair of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) Ethical Committee, whom I first met at the International Congress of the World Association for Social Psychiatry (WASP) in Agra in 2001. I had been asked by the President of WASP, Professor S. Sharma, to organise a session on conflict resolution there on the strength of my paper on that subject (please see my updated paper; *Journal of the World Association for Dynamic Psychiatry*, January 2004, **204/205**, 89–98). Since then I have organised two successful conferences on conflict resolution, one in Malta in 2003 and the first in Cobham, Surrey, in May 2002. I am currently organising a third conference with the Andrew Sims Centre at the Institute of Psychiatry in July 2005. This is being co-sponsored by the WPA and the World Health Organization and is supported by the College.

A College special interest group on approaches to conflict, trauma and disaster would be best served by a combination of the perspectives of social psychiatry and psychotherapy. In previous conferences, experts from opposing sides of international conflict have come together in friendly dialogue; this will hopefully be repeated in July 2005 at the London conference, a highlight of which will be a symposium on The Contribution of Psychotherapy to Peace, with reference to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and with eminent speakers from the two sides. Professor Hamid Ghodse, Chair of the College Board of International Affairs, will also chair a plenary session at the conference. Dr George Ikkos, Chair of the College London Division, is on the conference organising committee and will be an active participant.

The aim of the special interest group would be to try to promote the discussion and development of approaches to conflict, trauma and disasters, through the auspices of the College. I would be happy to act as a group facilitator, as I have developed an interest in the field of conflict resolution over the last 4 years and an appreciation of the difficulties and opportunities that it affords. If established

the special interest group could lobby international bodies, and work with charities and welfare economists in the field.

The idea of a special interest group on conflict resolution is strongly supported by Professors Roy McClelland, Belfast, and John Cox, who is now the Secretary General of WPA. Both professors were key contributors to the Cobham and Malta conferences. The President of WPA, Professor Ahmed Okasha, Cairo, who wholeheartedly supports the next conference, is particularly interested in conflict resolution, and at the Malta meeting he set up a WPA task force because of the WPA's grave concern over the escalating violence in the Middle East.

Members are invited to write in support of this group and express willingness to participate in its activities. Interested members should write to the Registrar care of Miss Sue Duncan at the College. If 120 members reply to this notice within 4 months of publication, then Council shall formally approve the establishment of this special interest group.

**Dr Andrew Fairbairn** Registrar, Royal College of Psychiatrists

## Proposal for a special interest group in occupational psychiatry

Procedure for establishing a special interest group:

- (1) Any member wishing to establish a special interest group shall write to the Registrar with relevant details
- (2) The Registrar shall forward the application to Council.
- (3) If Council approves the principle of establishing such a special interest group, then it will direct the Registrar to place a notice in the *Bulletin*, or its equivalent, asking members of the College to write in support of such a group and expressing willingness to participate in its activities.
- (4) If at least 120 members reply to this notice within 4 months of publication, then Council shall formally approve the establishment of the special interest group.

In accordance with this procedure, Council has approved a proposal for the establishment of a special interest group in occupational psychiatry.

## Background to the proposal from Dr John Sharkey:

### *The importance of work*

When we think of who and what we are, work is an important consideration.



columns

We are increasingly dependent upon the workplace for our status, our social circle and our identity. Our occupation occupies us more than our hobbies, our families or our community. We are more likely to be depressed if we have no work. Work is central to our lives.

#### ***The workplace and mental health***

Work pressures have changed with the move from an industrial to a knowledge economy. Depression has become more significant than musculoskeletal complaints as a reason for absence from work. There is media speculation of a stress epidemic. Doctors have become increasingly unhappy. Recent research from the Royal College of Psychiatrists has revealed the extent of burnout and psychological distress among psychiatrists.

#### ***Occupational psychiatry?***

Occupational medicine is a specialism as is occupational psychology, so why not

occupational psychiatry? Occupational medicine is increasingly orientated towards mental health issues. Work pressure is an aetiological factor within the stress vulnerability model for all mental health problems. Some psychiatrists are already interested in the relationship between work and mental health and it seems logical that they form a group. In the United States, psychiatrists have organised themselves to provide a united voice about workplace matters and have gained a foothold in the corporate world as a consequence.

#### ***What would the special interest group in occupational psychiatry do?***

The group would be at the forefront in collating opinion and developing training in occupational psychiatry. At present there is no formal training in occupational psychiatry in the UK.

With time this group will hopefully be able to banish the word stress to history. While distress cannot be eradicated, it is possible to develop a more accurate agreed and constructive language to describe distress and psychiatric syndromes arising within the workplace.

Dissemination of considered opinion would benefit patient care. A greater knowledge of the helpful and detrimental aspects of work and principles on how to manage these would also be useful for ourselves.

Members are invited to write in support of this group and express willingness to participate in its activities. Interested members should write to the Registrar care of Miss Sue Duncan at the College. If 120 members reply to this notice within 4 months of publication, then Council shall formally approve the establishment of this special interest group.

**Dr Andrew Fairbairn** Registrar, Royal College of Psychiatrists