

## EDITORIAL

### Twenty years on<sup>1</sup>

The first British journal to be concerned exclusively with mental illness appeared in 1848. Its title, *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, indicated the ambitious objectives of its founder editor, Forbes Benignus Winslow – ‘to establish a periodical devoted to the discussion of questions in relation to the Human Mind in its abnormal condition’ (Winslow, 1848).

The structure and contents of Winslow’s journal were based on his notion of psychological medicine, incorporating not only mental illness but also the study of abnormal behaviour from the medical standpoint. In this conception he was well ahead of his time. The journal did not long survive him but psychological medicine, as a concept and as a term distinct from and broader than psychiatry, slowly established itself within the body of British medical thinking. More than a century was to pass, however, before the appearance of another journal devoted explicitly to the theme. As its founder editor I have tried to summarize the spirit in which it was launched:

‘Our initial task was to tackle 3 questions, namely the colour of the dust-jacket, an agreement on objectives, and a title. The first was easily resolved: since nothing in psychiatry is black or white, grey was evidently the colour of choice. With regard to objectives, we had thought originally of aiming at the education of professors of psychiatry: but their halo of omniscience appeared to be impenetrable, so we settled for the goal of indispensability by determining to concentrate on original, high-quality work across the wide spectrum of both psychiatry and its allied disciplines. In so doing we were virtually compelled to resurrect Winslow’s title’ (Shepherd, 1986).

This issue of *Psychological Medicine* signals the twentieth year of its existence. In retrospect it is possible to echo Winslow’s sentiments, if not his mode of expression:

‘We have outlived a most unfavourable prognosis. Dismal were the forebodings with which our entrance into life was greeted. Persons who wished us a happy and prosperous voyage, speculated (as kind friends often do) either upon our gradual decay or premature dissolution. Thank God, we still breathe, we can throw ourselves into the editorial chair, and with philosophical benignity, look back with pleasure upon the PAST and with glowing anticipations towards the FUTURE’ (Winslow, 1850).

After two decades it may be permissible to mention the past, if only to raise the complex question of the assessment of quality, especially of an independent journal unassociated with any professional body. Survival is one criterion, perhaps the most important. Other criteria include a growing list of subscribers; a steady increase in size (from 100 to 272 pages per issue); offshoots in the form of monograph supplements and a five-volume *Handbook of Psychiatry*; number of citations and a high impact factor (Lloyd & Fletcher, 1989); even a review as a learned journal in the *Times Literary Supplement* (Bloch, 1987). If by such indices *Psychological Medicine* has been relatively successful much of the credit is attributable to a large number of workers – expert editorial and international advisory boards, painstaking referees, and a sympathetic publisher. Without their support it would have been impossible to sustain what I regard as a primary editorial function, that of ‘representing and, if necessary, helping to create standards which unify a professional group. In this sense it is an active role, one which demands a point of view... A good journal both reflects current trends and points constantly towards the future. It also functions by laying down criteria which act as guidelines and incentives to younger recruits in the field’ (Shepherd, 1986).

As to future prospects, these will surely be related to the point underlined by John Ziman in arguing the case for science as public knowledge: ‘the hallmark of a new discipline is the

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establishment of a specialized journal catering to the scholarly needs of its exponents. It constitutes an act of solidarity and sodality, and polarizes the subject around it' (Ziman, 1976). Ultimately, it is the readers of *Psychological Medicine* who must judge whether it has come to assume this role. On their verdict will depend its future.

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