

We believe that lessons learnt will help national and international psychiatric societies and institutions to develop locally relevant action plans to improve both the image of and recruitment into psychiatry. Any such strategies, however, will have to be an integral part of a wider plan to meet the greater challenges facing psychiatry, as outlined in the editorial (Ikkos, 2010).

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The psychiatrist of the new millennium: training needs, clinical skills, professional risks

Sir: On 13–16 October 2010, Italian early-career psychiatrists met at their first national conference, held in Riccione, to address training, and clinical and professional issues relevant to psychiatrists of the new millennium.

Recent social changes and reforms to mental health legislation have occurred in most European countries, together with continuous technological advances and the development of research in all the domains of psychiatry; these have modified the role of mental health professionals, with consequent changes to the training needs of early-career psychiatrists.

The clinical knowledge and skills expected of young psychiatrists today differ from those expected in the past. For instance, in relation to diagnosis, young psychiatrists tend to emphasise the use of diagnostic tools and statistical manuals, at the expense of thorough clinical and psychopathological assessments. Moreover, the first-generation psychotropic drugs, such as lithium, haloperidol and tricyclic antidepressants, whose efficacy is now well documented, have largely been replaced by drugs which are easier to use and safer, but whose efficacy is not as well established.

Furthermore, today's psychiatrists are increasingly challenged to search for a balance between the typical acts of clinical daily work and professional responsibility. In fact, the increasing awareness of patients and their families of the therapeutic options and possibility to recover from mental illnesses has led to several legal controversies with physicians.

During the conference, organised by the Italian Young Psychiatrists' Association, 12 plenary lectures, given by international and national experts, were held to open up the discussion of these issues. Professor Sartorius delivered a lecture on the possible future scenarios of psychiatry, and Professor Munk-Jørgensen on the academic responsibility of being a psychiatrist today. The roles of psychopathology, social psychiatry and biological psychiatry in the training and practice of young psychiatrists were addressed by Professors Sass, Priebe and Moeller, respectively. Professor Burns' lecture highlighted the importance of research findings for psychiatric practice.

The conference was attended by almost 800 European and Italian trainees and young psychiatrists (aged below 40 or less than 5 years from completion of postgraduate training), who had the chance to improve their psychiatric education, to exchange and discuss their experiences with leaders, and to present the results of their own research and clinical activities.

The scientific programme was conceived as an ideal path, which moved from the 12 plenary lectures of opinion leaders to the everyday practice of young psychiatrists discussed in the 30 symposia, 20 forums and 10 courses for continuing medical education (CME). Moreover, three workshops were organised, on how to carry out research (Professors Barbui and Cipriani), how to write scientific papers (Professor Munk-Jørgensen) and how to approach treatment-resistant depression (Dr Joubert). Finally, a symposium on opportunities to work and practise in Europe, with the participation of young colleagues from the UK (A. Malik and J. Beezhold), Germany (I. Calliess) and Croatia (N. Jovanovic), was highly appreciated by Italian young psychiatrists.

The positive feedback received from this event suggests the importance of such meetings, which could be very useful for all European early-career psychiatrists if implemented at national and international levels.

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Correspondence is welcome either on articles published in *International Psychiatry* or on aspects of current policy and practice in psychiatry in different countries. Letters (of up to 500 words) should be sent to:
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