

# Mental health services for people from black and other ethnic minorities

*Dele Olajide and John Cox*

**Why do we need a Register of Members who have an interest in transcultural psychiatry and service provision for ethnic minorities?**

Ethnicity is a psychosocial construct that refers to a subjective identity held by an individual which is defined by language, religion, skin colour, country of ancestry and culture. It is best defined, therefore, by the individual concerned and may change with time. Mental health services thus need to address issues of racism and of cultural differences, especially when providing services for people from black and other ethnic minority communities.

The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' (OPCS) Census in 1991 was for the first time analysed using ten high-level categories of ethnicity: White, Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-Other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other Groups Asian and Other Groups-Other. Based on this categorisation, 6.2% of the population of England and Wales is made up of ethnic minorities.

The Government and the Royal College of Psychiatrists are concerned to ensure that service providers address the needs of ethnic minority groups equitably. Purchasers and providers of health and social care have a responsibility to assess the health and social needs of their resident local populations. In order to do this, however, authorities need to know the ethnic mix of their populations and be able to monitor the take-up of services according to identified needs. The *Mental Illness Key Area Handbook* (Department of Health, 1994) recommends the provision of community services that are local, accessible, flexible and culturally relevant to the population served. In order

to achieve these objectives, service planning, development, provision and evaluation should have input not only from the local communities but from experts familiar with the local culture.

In 1994 the National Health Service Executive issued an executive letter EL(94)77 making mandatory the collection of ethnic group data for all in-patients using the OPCS Census classification from 1 April 1995. Such ethnic data collection will help to monitor the pattern of service take-up, types of intervention provided within the system, as well as the quality of after-care to ensure adequate community support. To ensure that culturally sensitive services are provided for people from ethnic minority communities, service commissioners and providers will require access to relevant expertise.

As Members of the College are among the key players in the provision of mental health services for ethnic minorities, a register of Members with a particular interest in transcultural psychiatry will be an invaluable resource and this is the *raison d'être* for the proposed register. We hope you will contact the College directly and/or complete a questionnaire (available on request from the College, Postgraduate Educational Services) if you are able to assist us.

## Reference

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (1994) *The Health of the Nation: Mental Illness Key Area Handbook* (2nd edn). London: HMSO.

Dele Olajide, *Senior Medical Officer, Department of Health, 133-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG*; John Cox, *Dean, Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG*