

World Psychiatry and the WPA task force to promote dissemination of psychiatric research conducted in low and middle income countries

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Abstract. *World Psychiatry*, the official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), is now published in five languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian and French) and reaches more than 33,000 psychiatrists in 121 countries. It received recently its first impact factor, 3.896. The publication of the journal has two objectives. The first is to reach as many psychiatrists of the various countries of the world as possible, disseminating information on recent significant clinical, service and research developments in a language that can be assimilated by the vast majority of them. The second is to give voice to psychiatrists of all regions of the world, encouraging submission of research papers, commentaries and reports on innovative service modalities. Related to this second objective has been the establishment by the WPA of a task force aiming to promote dissemination of psychiatric research conducted in low and middle income countries. Among the objectives of this task force is to advise and support the editors of high quality journals produced in those countries in their efforts to achieve indexation.

Declaration of Interest: None.

When my article entitled “*World Psychiatry: trying to reach psychiatrists worldwide*” (Maj, 2003) appeared in *Epidemiologia e Psichiatria Sociale*, we had published just three issues of this new official journal of the *World Psychiatric Association* (WPA). Now we have reached the ninth year of existence of the journal, and we are proud to report on its growth, which has gone well beyond our expectations.

World Psychiatry received last June its first impact factor, 3.896, thus ranking in the top ten of international journals of general psychiatry.

The journal is now published in five languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian and French. Selected articles or abstracts are also translated in other languages, such as Japanese, Czech, Polish and Romanian, and posted on the website of the WPA and/or relevant WPA Member Societies. All issues of the journal can be freely downloaded from PubMed Central and the WPA website. The paper version of the journal reaches more than 33,000 psychiatrists in 121 countries, being for many thousands of them the only accessible international psychiatric journal.

In compliance with a decision made by the WPA Executive Committee in 2001, the journal does not contain advertisements.

The publication of *World Psychiatry* has two main objectives, which make it different from most, possibly all, other international psychiatric journals. The first objective is to reach as many psychiatrists of the various countries of the world as possible, disseminating information on recent significant clinical, service and research developments in a language that can be assimilated by the vast majority of them. Relevance to everyday clinical practice of the average psychiatrist and usefulness to foster his/her professional growth are the two main criteria by which an article submitted to *World Psychiatry* is evaluated. In addition to this, the style of the paper must be simple and clear. The second objective is to give voice to psychiatrists of all regions of the world, encouraging submission of research papers, commentaries and reports on innovative service modalities.

Given these two objectives, it is understandable that the ingredients and the overall flavor of each issue of *World Psychiatry* are different from those of other international psychiatric journals. An important ingredient is represented by the forums, which are particularly appreciated by our readership and usually attract several quotations in the international literature. Among the most successful forums we published in the past few years are those on the

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concept of mental disorder (Wakefield, 2007), on the steps and challenges in the development of community mental health care (Thornicroft *et al.*, 2008), on the role of functional impairment in the diagnosis of mental disorders (Üstün & Kennedy, 2009), on conflicts of interests in psychiatry (Fava, 2007), on early intervention in psychosis (McGorry *et al.*, 2008), and on advantages and disadvantages of the dichotomous classification of psychosis (Craddock & Owen, 2007). Each of these forums included participants from all continents. Another special ingredient is represented by the mental health policy papers, providing information on innovative experiences in mental health care from various regions, or addressing issues, such as psychiatric brain drain (Gureje *et al.*, 2009) or burnout in psychiatrists (Kumar, 2007), which are rarely covered in international psychiatric journals.

Among research reports, we give priority to international and national multicenter studies providing data on epidemiology of mental disorders in various countries or testing innovative modalities of mental health service delivery or psychosocial interventions. In the past few years, we hosted for instance two of the main reports on the *World Mental Health Survey Initiative* (Kessler *et al.*, 2007; Wang *et al.*, 2007); the first community study of the prevalence and correlates of mental disorders in Iraq (Alhasnawi *et al.*, 2009), which attracted the attention of the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*; and the first controlled trial of a classroom-based intervention for children and adolescents exposed to war experiences in the Middle East (Karam *et al.*, 2008).

Among the articles published in *World Psychiatry* in the last two years, 25 (21%) had at least one author from a low or middle income country (LMIC), including seven with at least one author from Africa.

Related to the second objective of the publication of *World Psychiatry* (giving voice to psychiatrists of all regions of the world) has been the establishment by the WPA in 2008 of a task force aiming to promote dissemination of psychiatric research conducted in LMIC (Mari *et al.*, 2010). This task force, including H. Hermann, V. Patel, J. Mari, P. Tyrer and C. Kieling, has four main aims:

- a) to appraise the quality of non-indexed LMIC psychiatric journals to find potential candidates for indexation in the main databases;
- b) to advise and support the editors of these journals in their efforts to obtain indexation;
- c) to identify the most productive LMICs in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America;
- d) to explore the relationship between research capacity and the indexation of LMIC journals in the main databases.

The task force carried out a survey in Medline and Web of Science in order to identify indexed journals in the field of psychiatry according to their country of origin. Among 222 indexed psychiatric journals, none was found to originate from a low income country, and only nine (4.1%) from a middle income country (Kieling *et al.*, 2009a). Information obtained from the WPA and the Global Forum for Health Research indicated the existence of 118 non-indexed psychiatric journals in LMICs. A follow-up to that survey was recently conducted and published in the *Lancet* (Kieling *et al.*, 2009b): only four new LMIC journals were included in the two databases, so that the proportion of LMIC indexed journals slightly increased to 5.5% (13 out of 235).

The task force asked the editors of non-indexed psychiatric journals from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America to compile a questionnaire to provide information on the geographic representation of their journal, the composition of the editorial board, the number of original and review articles published in the journal, and the periodicity of its publication. Twenty-six compiled questionnaires were received. The task force assessed these journals applying similar criteria as those adopted by the Medline/PubMed and ISI/Thomson databases. Five journals which might be ready for submission to the databases were selected for special support and advice. One of these journals, the *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, has recently achieved indexation in PubMed.

The publication of *World Psychiatry* and the work of the above-mentioned task force are part of the WPA strategy outlined in the Action Plan 2008-2011 (Maj, 2008; 2009). It is symptomatic in this respect that the forum of the latest issue of *World Psychiatry*, introduced by a paper by Katschnig (2010), is entitled "Are psychiatrists an endangered species?". Indeed, we and our profession are stigmatized in many countries of the world. This is certainly related to our difficulty to convey the new image of psychiatry: the image of an integrative discipline, which deals with a broad range of disorders, including some that are very common in the population, using interventions that are at least as effective as those available to most other branches of medicine. However, it would not be fair to state that psychiatry has just a problem with promoting more successfully its new image. It has to be acknowledged that our profession also has a problem, in several contexts in many countries, with making the reality of its practice, research and training match up to this new image.

Our hope is that the dissemination of *World Psychiatry* and other related initiatives of the WPA will contribute to upgrade the image and the reality of psychiatry in as many countries of the world as possible.

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