

## Results

The questionnaire responses indicated that the participants' quality of life, mental health and physical health improved over the course of the intervention. The women told stories about 'significant changes' highlighting the positive impact of the intervention, with themes of economic participation, social inclusion, discrimination, physical health and future orientation. Information about HIV risk behaviours was limited by inhibitions about reporting sexual behaviours.

Each of the groups developed an action plan for promoting mental health and the longer-term sustainability of the group. Several of these plans included proposals for income generation.

A relatively generous allowance was paid to the women to cover travel and childcare costs. No allowance was paid to the women after the PAGs concluded, but support for continuing meetings was given by NGOs. Although we do not know the extent to which the allowance influenced participation, this was important in motivating and recruiting women to participate in the intervention at the outset. Six months after the last PAG meeting, five of the six groups were still meeting and some have since expanded their activities.

## Discussion

This participatory intervention study to promote the mental health of widows of IDUs apparently had a positive impact on the participants' quality of life and mental health. However, the sustainability of the improvement and the links between this and their engagement in HIV risk behaviours remain to be demonstrated. The intervention also increased awareness among the NGO leadership of the situation faced by the widows of IDUs. The MSC process was important in this.

Widows in India are socially and economically disadvantaged, and the situation for widows of IDUs is often worse. They are frequently stigmatised on three levels – for being a woman, for being a widow and for being HIV-positive.

Participatory approaches to mental health promotion may well have a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable women and potential to contribute to HIV prevention. Poverty alleviation through economic participation is likely to be a mediating factor, as well as a consequence of improved mental health. Further investigation is warranted.

## References

- Chandra, P. S., Carey, M. P., Carey, K. B., *et al* (2003) HIV risk behaviour among psychiatric inpatients: results from a hospital-wide screening study in southern India. *International Journal of STD and AIDS*, **14**, 532–538.
- Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2004) *The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique: A Guide To Its Use*. Available at <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.htm> (accessed May 2009).
- Desjarlais, R., Eisenberg, L., Good, B., *et al* (1995) *World Mental Health: Problems and Priorities in Low-Income Countries*. Oxford University Press.
- Devine, A., Kermode, M., Chandra, P., *et al* (2007) A participatory intervention to improve the mental health of widows of injecting drug users in north-east India as a strategy for HIV prevention. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, **7**, 3.
- Freeman, M., Patel, V., Collins, P., *et al* (2005) Integrating mental health in global initiatives for HIV/AIDS. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **187**, 1–3.
- Herrman, H., Saxena, S. & Moodie, R. (eds) (2005) *Promoting Mental Health: Concepts, Emerging Evidence, Practice*. World Health Organization.
- Kermode, M., Devine, A., Chandra, P., *et al* (2008) Some peace of mind: assessing a pilot intervention to promote mental health among widows of injecting drug users in north-east India. *BMC Public Health*, **8**, 294.
- Manandhar, D. S., Osrin, D., Shrestha, B. P., *et al* (2004) Effect of a participatory intervention with women's groups on birth outcomes in Nepal: cluster-randomised controlled trial. *Lancet*, **364**, 970–979.
- Walker, L., Verins, I., Moodie, R., *et al* (2005) Responding to the social and economic determinants of mental health: a conceptual framework for action. In *Promoting Mental Health: Concepts, Emerging Evidence, Practice* (eds H. Herrman, S. Saxena & R. Moodie). World Health Organization.
- WHO (2000) *Women's Mental Health: An Evidence Based Review*. World Health Organization.
- WHO (2007) *Mental Health: Strengthening Mental Health Promotion*. Fact Sheet 220. World Health Organization.

## NEWS AND NOTES

Contributions to the 'News and notes' column should be sent to: Amit Malik MRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist, Hampshire Partnership NHS Trust, UK, email [ip@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:ip@rcpsych.ac.uk)

## College at the TOP conference

The TOP (Teachers of Psychiatry) conference in Singapore (24–25 February 2009) was organised by the Department of Psychological Medicine, National University of Singapore, with the participation of the Western Pacific Division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Pacific Rim College of Psychiatrists and Asian Federation of Psychiatric Associations. There were 270 participants, from Asia, Australia, the USA and Europe. The College provided financial assistance to 16 young psychiatrists from Asia.

The keynote lecture, 'Training psychiatrists for the future', was delivered by Professor Norman Sartorius. The College

President, Professor Dinesh Bhugra, spoke on training the trainers, Emeritus Professor Scott Henderson gave tips on teaching research skills and Professor M. P. Deva discussed issues of primary care psychiatry in Asia.

The conference stirred renewed interest in psychiatric education and academic psychiatry. The participants indicated that the most stimulating and relevant topics discussed were:

- training the trainers
- psychiatric education for primary care doctors
- campus mental health
- rethinking psychological therapy in Asia.

The TOP club intends to organise future workshops in Asia on these four topics.

## Workshop on mental health for the Prisons Department, Kenya

In December 2008, the African Division of the College, in collaboration with the Department of Prisons of the Government of Kenya, the Kenya Psychiatric Association, the University of Nairobi, the Africa Mental Health Foundation and others organised a training workshop for Prison Health Service staff. The aim was to provide basic skills in identifying mental disorders, to introduce evidence-based mental health practices, to improve interdepartmental cooperation and to reduce stress and burn-out among prison staff. The workshop, held in Nairobi, was supported by a financial grant from the College (£3000). Of the 50 clinicians (clinical officers, nurses, laboratory and nutrition staff and technicians) attached to the Prison Health Service, 27 were able to attend. They were selected on the basis of seniority at their stations and geographical location to ensure a regional representation of all the prisons in the country.

The topics included stress management and burn-out, mental health and crime, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, personality disorders, sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS, drug use, depression and suicide, and quality of data assurance. At the end of the workshop, participants and the organisers agreed the following were needed to improve mental health in prisons:

- a 2-week training course for all clinical staff, which should additionally cover record keeping
- a 2-day exposure workshop for senior clinicians and officers in all prison facilities in Kenya
- a survey of mental disorders and substance misuse in prisons (a protocol has already been developed and approved by the Research and Ethics Committee but funding is lacking).

## Fund-raising trek to Kerala for the International Volunteer Programme

In February, 14 psychiatrists and friends completed a demanding sponsored trek in aid of the College's International Volunteer Programme. The participants, who persuaded other people to sponsor this challenge, raised over £30 000. The College is repeatedly made aware of the difficulties faced by members who are working as lone psychiatrists with little support, and the International Volunteer Programme is one way in which the College is responding. The funds raised will support psychiatrists to offer assistance at the request of overseas College members in countries such as Malawi, Ghana, Iraq and Sri Lanka. The trek and the fund-raising activities of the trekkers also raised awareness about the lack of provision for people with mental disorders in low- and middle-income countries.

The trekkers successfully climbed Meesapuli (8700 feet), the second highest peak of the Western Ghat Mountains in India, a challenging endeavour in temperatures ranging from 7°C to 40°C. They slept in tents, walked with backpacks and used torches for light.

This is the first time the College has organised such a fund-raising event. Readers wishing to contribute to the

International Volunteer Programme fund can do so online: <http://www.justgiving.com/rcpsych> or by cheques sent to Liz Cowan at the College.

## The Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in Kenya

The Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has been supporting the development of better child and adolescent mental health services in Kenya since 2006, and each year has generously provided a small budget to support this work. In 2009, the Faculty is supporting the International Institute of Special Needs Offenders in its work to develop youth offending services in Kenya, with a particular focus on the mental health needs of young offenders. This work builds on previous work developing multi-agency protocols and training in youth offending work in Nairobi, which was evaluated by the University of Lancaster and found to be highly effective in developing services. In addition, a scoping exercise in 2009 will look at how best to enhance the capacity of the specialist child and adolescent mental health team at Nairobi University by means of further training.

For further information contact Dr Michael van Beinum via the Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the College London office.

## The European Division World Congress of Mental Health

The European Division of the College will participate in the World Congress of the World Federation for Mental Health in Athens, 2–6 September 2009, with a symposium on 'Ethical challenges in medicine and psychiatry', chaired by the chair of the Division, Professor George Christodoulou.

Professor Christodoulou will also speak on 'Ethical issues in research: the declaration of Helsinki', Professor George Ikkos will speak on 'Professionalism and ethics', Dr Thanassis Douzenis on 'Ethics and compulsory admissions' and Dr Maria Margariti on 'Ethical issues in telecommunications'. The discussants will be Professor John Copeland and Professor Jitendra Trivedi.

The Congress is organised by the World Federation for Mental Health (the organisation that sets the theme of the World Mental Day, 10 October) in collaboration with the Hellenic Psychiatric Association and the Society of Preventive Psychiatry.

Further information is available on the Congress website, <http://www.wmhc2009.com>, or by emailing [info@era.gr](mailto:info@era.gr), [gchristodoulou@ath.forthnet.gr](mailto:gchristodoulou@ath.forthnet.gr), [psych@psych.gr](mailto:psych@psych.gr).

## African Journal of Psychiatry

The *African Journal of Psychiatry* has been selected for inclusion in the MEDLINE database. This has been years in the making but worth all the effort. Africa now has representation for psychiatry in one of the world's major databases.