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“ENLIGHTENMENT FROM AFRICA”

Although Africa was termed the “darkest” continent and often reflected in the media as only having multiple insoluble problems – there are significant issues which have unique approaches which are shedding light on the psychiatry of the region.

The Africa Division has certain specific and very different characteristics. Although a small division by membership, the group has been highlighted at the Annual Congress with interesting, topical and stimulating sessions. The nature and wide distribution of the membership makes this an extremely important event. Attendance has been very good indeed by members, expatriates and friends as well as those keen to learn from the subject matter presented.

The session for London in July 2008 will address the issue of stigma in the African social-cultural context and its effects. It will include discussion on the role of evidence-based approach to reduction or minimisation stigma. It will include the African concept of mental illness and the stigma towards mental illness by medical professionals. The process by which the mentally ill persons and their families stigmatise themselves and the role of research on stigma in the African context promises to stimulate debate. The effects of stigma are multiple, but the overall result is in the mentally ill-patients not getting the full benefits of available or potentially available services. An understanding of the issues within the African context by all role players will greatly facilitate improved services for persons with mental illness. It is planned that audience discussion would contribute their own experiences to the session.

A proposal has been formulated for attracting associate members as the only way to increase numbers. Consideration should be given to a suggestion to have a once off “catch up” in registering a large number of senior colleagues as affiliates. A list is being compiled. Other suggestions to strengthen the membership are welcome.

Future activities of the Division will be involvement in the number of local congresses planned for the continent. There will be participation of the College and support from other institutions. Relatively large numbers are expected to attend the African meetings over the next few years. The African Association of Psychiatrists and Allied Professions (AAPAP) will be holding the next meeting in Ghana (24 – 26 April 2008). This has been changed from its previously planned venue, which was Nigeria.

Professor Tuviah Zabow

2007 NATIONAL MENTAL CONFERENCE IN ZAMBIA

The above Conference, the first of its type in Zambia took place in Lusaka, Zambia, from 19th - 21st November 2007 under the auspices of the Mental Health Association of Zambia and Chairmanship of its Executive Director, Mr. Isaac K. Mwendepole also a founding member of the Association when it was formed in 1968. The theme was most apt - "No Health Without Mental Health. Time for action to meet the challenges". It was officially opened by the Minister for Health, who insisted on staying through the Keynote speech, and had skipped a Cabinet meeting to be present. This must be a reflection of the Government commitment to Mental Health in Zambia.

There were several plenaries and also several group discussion/symposia, covering a wide range of topics - ranging from Mental Health Advocacy, Mental Health Human Resources, Stigma and Mental Health Services for both civil patients and those in contact with the law, and the various mental health well being issues and problems through out the life cycle.

The participants included mental health workers of various disciplines, Government officials in charge of medical services at the National, Provincial and District levels, politicians, the Prisons Services including ex-prisoners, the Police, the Clergy. The academia was also involved with emphasis for evidence (Research) based practices and policies. Current and past patients from Chainama Psychiatric Hospital took part in the deliberations and socially interacted with all the participants including eating together. Also in attendance and participating were resource people from South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and USA.

This was a truly a multi-disciplinary cross-sectional conferences whose deliberations and in particular conclusions were collectively owned by Zambians. They agreed to make Mental Health issues a public concern in Zambia and invited open debate.

Reported by Prof. David M. Ndetei and Isaac K. Mwendapole.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW: 2007

How time flies! The year 2007 has come and gone in a seeming flash for the members of the African Psychiatric fraternity. The speed however is at least in part the result of the dizzying numbers of events that have taken place in the past year.

In March, the entire world met in Nairobi for what was without a doubt the meeting of the year for Africa. Led by its President (Sheila Hollins) and accompanied by Hamid Godshe and his successor Rachel Jenkins (Director of International Affairs), the College was at the meeting represented by others including Vanessa Cameron – Chief Executive and the Editor of the British Journal of Psychiatry Prof. Peter Tyrer. This was indeed one of the largest delegations from the College to any regional meeting and was a first for Africa. Many other members of the College from other divisions from all over the world were also present and participated by presenting papers. One that stood out was a session by The President and Professor Tony Holland from Cambridge University that dealt with the subject of intellectual disability which is a subject that is severely neglected in Africa.

Concrete achievements resulting from this meeting included a successful session by members of the College on the second day of the meeting. A formal meeting between the Africa Division and the officers of the College, but the highlight was the meeting between Prof. Peter Tyrer and the Executive Committee of the African Association of Psychiatrists and Allied Professions (AAPAP), which created the practical steps that have now led to Africa having an official Journal of AAPAP with close links to the British Journal of Psychiatry (BJPsy). These concrete achievements have very significant long term benefits for both Africa and the College.

The other major events took place during the Annual meeting of the College which this year took place in Edinburgh. The session by the African Division was extremely well received and the papers presented were of high quality. It is expected that African presence will continue to be felt positively in all future College meetings for the benefit of members of the College as a whole.

The formal meetings with the College officers have led to serious discussions on future meetings and budgets among other important matters. These discussions are ongoing.

Members of the Africa Division met in Sun City, South Africa from 26th – 30th August 2007 and consolidated their discussions on budgets, work plans for the next three years as well as plans for the recruitment of more members to the Division.

All in all 2007 has been a year of many activities and achievements and will go down in the history of the Division as the year of action!

By Dr. Frank Njenga, FRCPsych (UK)

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHIATRISTS IN NIGERIA, AND THE STAKEHOLDERS MEETING ON THE FUTURE OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE

The 38th Annual General Meeting of the Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria took place from the 15th to the 17th of November, 2007. It was hosted by the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital.

There were over one hundred registered participants at the three-day event, made up of Psychiatrists from all across the

nation, psychiatrists in training, and mental health care workers of other categories.

The meeting was flagged off with a speech by the Permanent Secretary, Lagos State Ministry of Health, Dr Aderemi Desalu, who represented the Governor of the State.

The theme of the conference was Mental Health Challenges of Rapid Urbanisation.

As part of the opening ceremony, The Professor Ayo Binitie lecture was delivered by Professor Jude Ohaeri. It's title was 'Coping with the Stress of Urban Living In The Urban Millennium – Ayo Binitie and Current Perspectives.' In the course of three days, over fifty papers were presented in plenary or parallel sessions. There were also several poster presentations.

There were two major innovations in this year's conference. One was the inaugural edition of the Lambo Lecture and Dinner. This event was held in memory of Professor Thomas Adeoye Lambo, the father of Nigerian Psychiatry and the creator of the Aro Village System. It took place on Friday, 16th November at the Banquet Hall of Sheraton Hotel and Tower, Ikeja. It was a grand affair attended by the matriarch of the Lambo family – Chief (Mrs) Dinah Lambo and Richard Lambo, one of the Lambo's three sons, as well as several associates and colleagues of the late Professor Lambo. The lecture was given by Professor Lai Erinosh, a prominent Sociologist, on the topic 'The Intellectual Legacy of Professor Thomas Adeoye Lambo'

The atmosphere of the Lambo dinner generated some fond discussion on the 1st Pan-African Psychiatric Conference which was held in Abeokuta in 1961, (unfortunately none of the psychiatrists in attendance were old enough to have attended!), and which featured the cream of World Psychiatry of the day, including Professor Aubrey Lewis, Prof Russel Brain, Dr Henry Collomb, Dr Alexander Boroffka, and Prof Alexander Leighton. It was hosted by Lambo, a young man then in his thirties, in a city which had virtually no hotel accommodation. It went on to be generally acknowledged as a great conference, and gave the first inkling that an African perspective could, and should be added to the mainstream of Psychiatry. It was a prelude to the Aro-Cornell Mental Health Research Project publications that would be released two years later, and all the other collaborations that were to follow in their wake.

On the last day of the conference, there was a Stakeholders Meeting on the future of Mental Health In Nigeria. It was sponsored by CBM, a German NGO whose representative – the young Englishman Dr Julian Eaton had spent a considerable amount of time in eastern Nigeria helping to organize a model for psychiatric care at the grassroots level. It featured a representative of the Minister for Health, and representatives from various sectors, including the Press, the general public, operators of Health Maintenance Organisations (who are crucial operators in the fledgling National Health Insurance Scheme), and various Non-Governmental Organizations. It started off with a keynote lecture given by Dr Femi Olugbile on the subject 'Organisation of Mental Health Services In Nigeria – a programme for change'. This presented an audit of personnel, processes and practices as they currently obtain in the country, highlighting the failure to provide access to care for the overwhelming majority of the mentally ill. There were other, shorter presentations. Subsequently the participants broke up into groups to deliberate on such topics as Legislation and Human Rights, Finance, and building capacity at Primary Health care level. A concluding plenary session ended in the drawing up of a communiqué which was presented to the press, and adopted as a platform for further activism in the course on the next year.

At the Annual General Meeting which rounded off the conference, a new Executive Committee was elected. Professor Oye Gureje was reelected as President. Dr Femi Olugbile was elected Vice President, and Dr Ephraim-Oluwanuga was elected Secretary

FORTH-COMING EVENTS

The next meeting of the Association of African Psychiatrists and Allied Professionals will take place in Accra, Ghana from April 24th -26th 2008 Many psychiatrists from all across Africa are expected to be in attendance.

The WPA regional meeting for Africa will be held from September 24th- 26th , 2009 in Abuja, Nigeria.

FROM THE EDITOR

The year 2007 is coming to a close. It has been a year full of activity in the mental health field in Africa, and in the African International Division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

In this edition, there are reports about activities in Zambia and Nigeria. There are overviews of the year from the perspectives of the Chairman, Professor Tuviah Zabow, and Dr Frank Njenga.

Finally there are hints of the great prospects ahead for Mental Health Care, and the interesting events to look forward to.

We wish our members and friends a Merry Christmas.

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