

A world of traditional healing in the Global South

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This November 2023 issue represents the end of my tenure as Editor in Chief of *BJPsych International*. I have held this position for 10 years; before that I was Deputy Editor to the Founding Editor, Hamid Ghodse, since the inception of the journal. It has been a fascinating journey and I have enjoyed every minute. *International Psychiatry* was originally published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Subsequently, when the suggestion was made that Cambridge University Press should take over that responsibility, I was uncertain of the implications for our identity and growth. I need not have worried. The support we have received from CUP has been tremendous. There have been so many innovations over the past five years that have provided added value to our readers, listeners and viewers. I was keen to introduce podcasts, and videos that would better illustrate the work our contributors are doing around the world than print alone. CUP responded with enthusiasm, facilitating our use of media and providing us with a wonderful website.

In recent years, we have witnessed the introduction of a CiteScore that is steadily growing and we have high Altmetric scores for many of our articles. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage our readers around the world to submit to the journal, which makes no charge for publication. Recently, our submission rate has suffered somewhat from the rash of predatory journals which are targeted particularly at our colleagues in countries that are relatively underrepresented among the most competitive scientific publications. There is, we suspect, a tendency for some potential contributors to be tempted by less rigorous reviewing procedures than we employ, at a price.

This issue

During my tenure, our mission has been primarily to promulgate examples of novel mental healthcare practice from countries where there is little or no formal psychiatric care available to most of the population. In many such regions, patients turn first to traditional healers or the Church. Among articles published in this issue, we find mention of these traditional pathways to care in Qatar (Mohammed et al),¹ Oman (Al-Sinawi et al),² Malawi (Kokota et al)³ and Kenya (Matoke).⁴ I was particularly struck by the revelation in the article on the management of psychosis in Malawi³ that up to 60% of caregivers of people with psychosis initially seek help

for their relative from traditional healers. The authors emphasise that traditional and religious beliefs and practices continue to play a large role in the pathway to care. These systems are integral to the core values and belief systems of Malawian culture and ‘should not be ignored’.

The North East England South Asia Mental health Alliance (NEESAMA) is the subject of an article (Devgun et al)⁵ that describes a partnership with mental health organisations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The authors opine that lessons learned from collaborating with those providing mental health services in the ‘Global South’ could lead to the delivery of more appropriate services to ethnic minorities in wealthier northern hemisphere countries too. Sensitivity to cultural beliefs is an especially important issue to consider when managing mental health problems among those caught up in the movement of traumatised refugees from south to north.

Although I am stepping down as Editor, I am hopeful that my successor will build on our initial reports on the role of traditional healers around the world, who have too often been ignored (or even suppressed) by those whose mental health training has been ‘evidence based’. A collaboration between traditional healing practitioners and psychiatrists seems to me to be essential in so many countries, not only in the Global South. We need to understand how best to encourage those afflicted by mental disorders in societies and cultures that do not conceptualise those disorders in the same way as we do to come forward for evidence-based treatments. Lydia Matoke reminds us of the Kenyan traditions of medical care that were lost when Britain colonised the country and endeavoured to eliminate what the colonisers regarded as ‘witchcraft’. In conclusion, I suggest we should be a little humble and recognise that although our Western education in medicine has brought about many benefits internationally in the practice of medicine and surgery, the mind remains mysterious and far less accessible to empirical research. Susceptibility to poor mental health is massively influenced by culture. Remember, the opportunity to explore this little-understood entity is what brought many of us into psychiatry in the first place.

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Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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Declaration of interest

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Professor David Skuse: a gentleman and a scholar

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Stepping down after a decade of service as editor of this journal, this brief testimonial recognises the pivotal contributions made by Professor David Skuse and highlights his stellar career achievements as an academic.

After a decade of success, David Skuse is stepping down as Editor-in-Chief of the *BJPsych International*. I cannot claim that I know David well, but perhaps I can say I know him well enough, as I have certainly known of him for a while through my dealings with the Royal College of Psychiatrists and its journals, and everyone who does know David well speaks of him highly and wishes him well, as do I.

Achieving such favour in any walk of life is no mean feat, even at the best of times, but this is especially the case in relation to the role of Editor-in-Chief of a psychiatric journal, a position that seldom increases one's circle of friends. Speaking to those who have had much more to do with David in his role as Editor-in-Chief of the *BJPsych International*, he is described as conscientious, considerate and caring, and if you add to this (and I would certainly elect to do so) courteous and competent, then you have a 'full house' – a hand that few editors genuinely hold – although many would bluff otherwise. Perhaps the best way of summing up these attributes and the many others that he is in possession of is that David is quintessentially a gentleman. Fortunately for the journal and indeed the College, over the years, he has imbued his role as editor with many of these qualities.

Another reason why the journal has succeeded academically, as exemplified by its CiteScore, is by

attracting contributions to its pages from the four corners of the world. However, possibly David's most winning qualities as an editor are that he is a quiet achiever and that he puts others before him, as evidenced by his self-effacing final editorial, in which he generously highlights the work of others and credits the journal's success to the collective efforts of those around him rather than claiming them as his own. It is this magnanimity that sets him apart, along with his scholarly excellence. I say this with some caution as it is important not to misconstrue the latter as magniloquent aggrandisement. For instance, I doubt both would be aware that David has published both in *Science* and *Nature*, not to mention *The Lancet* and *Nature Genetics*. It is therefore no surprise that his work has accrued nearly 30 000 citations and an H-index that would be the envy of most academics. And yet, a significant part of his mission in the journal has been to encourage research by those new to the art of research and for the journal to capture mental science across cultures to ensure it has a truly international presence.

Although I began this testimonial and expression of gratitude by stating that I do not know David personally, and this is still true, I feel I do know him somewhat by virtue of a shared medical provenance and commonality of training. David graduated in medicine from Manchester University, my *alma mater*, and underwent psychiatric training in London, at the Maudsley Hospital and Institute of Psychiatry – bastions of excellence that I too had the good fortune of experiencing. Thus, at some subliminal level, I feel we have a connection that is further strengthened by being editors of College journals. It is therefore with great admiration that I thank