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CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHIATRY, LIAISON PSYCHIATRY AND OTHER MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR MODERN PSYCHIATRISTS

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Beyond the awareness that psychiatry and contemporary medicine have undergone a dramatic change in recent years, walking the first steps as recently-qualified consultants in psychiatry is a major challenge. As a consequence of changes in society, technological progress and restricted funding availability, modern psychiatrists have to face problems that are new, and difficult to be faced, but also representing an opportunity to grow and contribute massively to medicine.

This is particularly true in two specific fields, cross-cultural psychiatry and consultation-liaison psychiatry. The former is defined as psychiatry of disorders influenced by the cultural background; the latter is defined as the care of psychiatric disturbances in the medically ill. Though generic, these definitions highlight what is challenging in these branches of psychiatry: the disposition towards an inter-disciplinary approach to human illnesses. Both deepen their roots in the bio-psycho-social paradigm of George Engel and were in fact frequently mentioned in Engel's writings as the future of psychiatry. Training and clinical experience in cross-cultural and consultation-liaison psychiatry are to be major components of the curriculum of psychiatric trainees.

Therefore, the role of psychiatrists and psychiatrists-to-be in the contemporary scientific community and society must be a strong one: on the side of scientific knowledge, by marking the complex, systemic nature of physiopathology and therapy; on the side of epistemology, by marking the paradoxes of bio-medicine; on the side of organization of health care, by promoting the need for a person-oriented approach to illness; and finally on the side of culture, society and ethics.