

BJP Psych

The British Journal of Psychiatry

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Chronopsychiatry

Smith et al

Detection of suicidality from medical text using privacy-preserving large language models

Wiest et al

Childhood psychosocial adjustment and midlife obesity, diabetes and hypertension: prospective study from two birth cohorts

Liu et al

Doughnut psychiatry as a living community model for sustainable development of children

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A23 Editorial Board

BJPsych Editorial

521 Academic psychiatry is everyone's business

Hugo D. Critchley, Derek K. Tracy, Gin S. Malhi, Laith Alexander, David S. Baldwin, Jonathan Cavanagh, Samuel R. Chamberlain, Andrea Cipriani, Saeed Farooq, Angela Hassiotis, Oliver Howes, Sameer Jauhar, Stephen M. Lawrie, Emmeline Lagunes-Cordoba, Anne Lingford-Hughes, James H. MacCabe, Ismail Memon, Ciaran Mulholland, Musa Sami, Kapil Sayal, Rohit Shankar, Lindsey Sinclair, Oliver Sparasci, Ekkehart F. A. Staufenberg, Lucy E. Stirland, Paul R. A. Stokes, Charlotte Wilson Jones, Peter W. R. Woodruff and Allan H. Young

525 Miscellaneous – Mythopsychopharmacology: definition and differential diagnosis

George Ikkos, Dickon Bevington, Daniel McQueen and Daniel Shears

Guest Editorials

526 Chronopsychiatry

Daniel J. Smith, Elise McGlashan, John Gottlieb, Nicholas Meyer and Matt W. Jones

529 Early detection and intervention through the lens of the neurodevelopmental framework: the salience of developmental years and related services

Andrea Raballo, Michele Poletti and Antonio Preti

Feature

532 Detection of suicidality from medical text using privacy-preserving large language models

Isabella Catharina Wiest, Falk Gerrik Verhees, Dyke Ferber, Jiefu Zhu, Michael Bauer, Ute Lewitzka, Andrea Pfennig, Pavol Mikolas and Jakob Nikolas Kather

Original Articles

538 Disease trajectories before dementia: evidence from a large-scale community-based prospective study

Jialin Li, Ding Xia, Mei Cui, Yingzhe Wang, Jincheng Li, Li Jin, Xingdong Chen, Chen Suo and Yanfeng Jiang

546 Poem – 'Whispers'

Sivasubramoney Krishnan

547 Electroconvulsive therapy response and remission in moderate to severe depressive illness: a decade of national Scottish data

David M. Semple, Szabolcs Suveges and J. Douglas Steele

556 Investigating inequalities in patient outcomes for first-episode psychosis

Dasha Nicholls, Jobie Budd, Philippa Nunn, Paul French, Jo Smith, Veenu Gupta, Jonathan Holdship and Alan Quirk

563 Childhood psychosocial adjustment and midlife obesity, diabetes and hypertension: prospective study from two birth cohorts

Lin Liu, Kevin Chun Hei Wu, Anping Cai, Aimin Xu and Bernard M. Y. Cheung

571 Psychiatry in television – *Alias Grace*

Katherine Elizabeth Witter

572 Clozapine, relapse, and adverse events: a 10-year electronic cohort study in Canada

Lloyd Balbuena, Shawn Halayka, Andrew Lee, A.G. Ahmed, Tamara Hinz, Nathan Kolla and Jenna Pylypow

Letters

579 Doughnut psychiatry as a living community model for sustainable development of children

H. Bruining and J. Bakker

581 Scaling up mental health interventions for people living with HIV in Zimbabwe: evidence for integration into differentiated service delivery programmes

Walter Mangezi, Munyaradzi Mapingure, Tafadzwa Dzinamarira, Innocent Chingombe, Tatenda Makoni, Amon Mpofo and Godfrey Musuka

Commentaries

583 Dosage effects of psychodynamic and schema therapy in people with comorbid depression and personality disorder: four-arm pragmatic randomised controlled trial: commentary, Mulder

Roger T. Mulder

585 Psychological framework to understand interpersonal violence by forensic patients with psychosis: commentary, Huang & Wei

Mei-Ling Huang and Lien-Chung Wei

Columns

586 Book reviews

588 Corrigendum

589 Contents of *BJPsych Advances*

590 Psychiatry in history – The Patna Lunatic Asylum and Dr Hutchinson's lunar observations

Madhusudan Dalvi

592 Psychiatry in art – The phenomenology within Cézanne's work: a reflection

João Martins-Correia

Cover picture

Portrait of George L. by John Miles

This picture is taken from a series of portraits of patients at the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, undertaken in the 1880s by John Miles. These portraits are of interest for several reasons. They are an example of patient art, only a small portion of which has survived from 19th century asylums. In addition, John Miles was both a professional artist and a patient at the Morningside institution. His portraits provide an insight into the patients' world: their appearance, demeanour, posture, clothing and their surroundings in the asylum. It is not clear how Miles's pictures came to be made. The portraits all have clinical information appended which suggests that asylum doctors were involved in the process at some point. Were the portraits produced for educational purposes? They were too small, being postcard-sized, to be used in lectures, but perhaps they were intended to illustrate a textbook of mental diseases, or as a visual record of the patients at the Royal Edinburgh Asylum. This portrait is of George L., who was admitted to the REA on the July 22nd 1867. He was single and of no occupation. No age was given. His diagnosis was "Epileptic Imbecility". The Asylum doctor wrote that the patient: "Has been insane all his life". He was considered suicidal and dangerous. His brother reported that George had always been of weak mind and that he had been epileptic for the last 8 years, being violent and excitable after his fits. The case notes recorded: He is fond of music, & constantly plays on the violin – before an epileptic seizure he breaks everything within reach his violin included. When well he is very good natured.

He continued to have fits and became progressively enfeebled. Latterly he was unable to work in the Asylum. He died in 1893 of "Epilepsy – 34 years. Pneumonia 3 days". John Miles, himself, was admitted to the Royal Edinburgh Asylum on the 21st May 1881, suffering from "melancholy". He was then 59 years old, married and described as a "Portrait Painter". On October 16th 1882 he was discharged "Recovered".

Picture credit: Lothian Health Services Archive. GD 16.

George L. case notes: LHB7 51 18. p. 349. John Miles case notes: LHB7/51/38. p.157.

Beveridge A, Cunynghame D. "A bruised reed shall he not break": John Miles's portraits of patients at the Royal Edinburgh Asylum. *J R Coll Physicians Edinb* 2021; 51: 298-301; 414-421.

I am grateful to Dr Louise Williams, Archivist, Lothian Health Services Archive, Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University Library for her help and for giving permission to use this image.

We are always looking for interesting and visually appealing images for the cover of the Journal and would welcome suggestions or pictures, which should be sent to Dr Allan Beveridge, British Journal of Psychiatry, 21 Prescot Street, London, E1 8BB, UK or bjp@rcpsych.ac.uk.

