

Correspondence

Letters for publication in the Correspondence columns should be addressed to:

The Editor, British Journal of Psychiatry, Chandos House, 2 Queen Anne Street, London, W1M 9LE

THE PLACE OF ETHOLOGY AND EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY IN PSYCHIATRY

DEAR SIR,

We should like to call attention to the work of the ethologists and the evolutionary anthropologists, and its significance to the practice of psychiatry. In a surprising departure, the 1973 Nobel prize in physiology and medicine has been awarded to three scientists who have pioneered in the study of animal behaviour. The Nobel committee noted that 'these first discoveries were made in insects, fishes and birds, but the basic principles have proved to be applicable also to mammals, including man.'

In our discussions with ethologists we have encountered again and again an exasperation with the psychiatric profession. Over about half a century ethologists have accumulated a wealth of data that are freely available, but psychiatrists barely take cognizance of this lode of information. The ethologists themselves, as well as some evolutionary anthropologists, are beginning to take the steps that psychiatrists should have taken, and are now embarking on ethological studies of the species *homo sapiens*. In the preface of *Early Childhood Autism—An Ethological Approach* (in *Advances in Ethology*, vol. 10, P. Parey, Berlin, 1972), E. A. Tinbergen and N. Tinbergen make a renewed appeal to the psychopathological profession to take more notice of some developments in ethology.

Here in England there are a few colleagues espousing such a view, but they form the barest trickle. How many papers have been published in our psychiatric journals on such topics? We should like to appeal to the academic heads of departments of psychology and psychiatry to consider seriously

including ethology in their curricula.

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TRANSCULTURAL PSYCHIATRY

DEAR SIR,

The study of transcultural psychiatry has received relatively little attention in this country in the past. In recent years there is increasing recognition of the fact that we live in a multicultural society, and psychiatrists (even if they never practise outside this country) must expect to see patients from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. In some cases it may be the conflict of cultural values that lies at the root of the psychiatric problem: in others, cultural differences will affect the way in which symptoms are presented and can be treated.

Through your columns, may we invite any British psychiatrists who have an interest in this field to write to either of the undersigned at the addresses given below, with a view to an exchange of information and ideas. Depending on the response, it may seem appropriate to arrange a discussion meeting or conference at some appropriate centre, and this in turn might lead to the formation of a specialist group within the College.

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