

---

# Letter from Washington

*Sydney Brandon*

---

The President of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), Rodrigo Munoz, chose as the subject for his Presidential Symposium 'State Medicaid Programmes' and set a clear political message for the rest of the meeting. Politics was prominent in many sessions, not least including a triumphal announcement that the Veterans Administration had been obliged to withdraw its rules permitting prescribing by non-medical staff. Last year Tipper Gore charmed the conference and this year Rosalynn Carter gave sincere support to community involvement in mental health problems.

Violence in schools was a pervasive theme with many different experts prescribing entirely different solutions. Gay, lesbian and transgender pride was represented by a well attended programme. Black Caucus, meetings of Caribbean, Cuban and other national groups seemed well supported. The North American Society of the Royal College of Psychiatrists which held its first meeting at the 131st meeting of the APA in Atlanta, Georgia in 1978 became a chapter and is now a group representing over 500 Fellows and Members of the College. The meeting on the Monday evening of each subsequent APA meeting is intended to keep our North American colleagues up to date with College activities and to provide an opportunity for them to meet visitors from the rest of the world including the UK. Usually an Officer of the College attends and gives a brief account of the previous years activities. On a number of occasions it has been my pleasure to fulfil this function and for some years after I ceased to hold office I was briefed by officers to give the short address. At a time when large numbers of British psychiatrists were attending the meeting I did not expect to be called upon. However, I found myself the only UK-based psychiatrist attending and the ebullient Dr Michael Cleary, who, with his charming wife, has hosted this meeting for the past six years, asked me to perform. I desperately tried to dredge up my recollections of the years activities. We really do need to recognise that our North American colleagues are a valuable resource of the College and that we should be more active in supporting the group and in encouraging links with psychiatry on the other side!

There were impressive technological developments in this year's meeting. The Housing

Reservation Bureau, however, decided to ignore these and required overseas delegates to submit written applications for accommodation instead of the usual fax or e-mail. As a result I found myself in rural Maryland with such a lengthy daily journey that I had to forgo the stimulating 6.30 am meetings. In the Hall of Mammon pharmaceutical companies dispensed their unbiased information with full use of the latest technologies. It was strangely gratifying to have a glamorous blonde clutch you to her bosom just to scan your membership barcode with her electronic wand. Thus extracting all of your registration data she could then ensure that once you returned home you would be visited at some inconvenient time by a company representative.

This year the annual free gift race was more covert. The usual bulging goodie bags were not much in evidence and discussions of the best free gifts were not to be heard. It was still possible to identify conference delegates in the streets of Washington – as they were the people carrying two umbrellas during the current drought.

This year we were offered tickets, strictly on a first come first served basis, to the American Holocaust Museum. I was fortunate enough to secure a ticket and after the normal closing time was able to visit this unique museum in company with a large crowd of psychiatrists. This was an intense emotional experience and I would like to advocate that this visit is made compulsory for all Washingtonians and their visitors.

Since it is impossible to attend all of the meetings of interest in this multi-ring circus I was grateful for the two CDs provided gratis which provide abstracts of all of the presentations.

The many sessions achieved very different attendance rates. The special lectures obtained the largest audiences and the lecture by Bessel van der Kolk was especially well attended with many hundreds seated and perhaps another hundred sitting on the floor or hanging from whatever they could. Surprisingly, the lecture was disappointing, for instead of the promised review of the social and neurobiological aspects of trauma we heard a political plea for funding. The lecture by Frank Putman was equally well attended and gave an impressive account of his research on the sequelae of child sexual abuse.

The session on dual diagnosis, an important statement on the needs of those with psychiatric illness and alcohol or other drug dependence was attended by only eight people all of whom had played an important role in research or care in this area. In contrast, the meetings on dissociation identity disorder were very well attended. One full session was devoted to 'Kleptomania and dissociative identity disorder: refining the psychiatric diagnosis'.

There were of course other reports of cutting edge research. Dr Alan Hirsch reported a study of lying. He and a student made a critical analysis of the video tape of President Clinton's deposition to the Grand Jury. They found that whenever he denied having a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky he scratched his nose and they concluded that when one lies erectile tissue

inside the nose engorges and in response the nose itches. On the other hand, it is possible that poor Bill was just seeking relief from allergic rhinitis?

Next year the Millennium meeting is in Chicago - the Windy City, so make a note in your diary 13-18 May 2000. Every year I am told that the attendance is the largest ever. This year there were approximately 18 500 delegates of whom 7222 were non-members. Is it possible that more College members attend the APA than the College's Annual General Meeting? Birmingham eat your heart out!

Sydney Brandon, *Emeritus Professor, 19 Holmfield Road, Leicester LE2 1SD*



## Mental Health of Ethnic Minorities: An Annotated Bibliography

*Dinesh Bhugra*

This book will be an invaluable source for mental health professionals who come into contact with minority ethnic groups in their clinical and research practice. It provides an annotated bibliography of recent papers which describe research on mental health of minority ethnic groups in the UK. Collected from a number of resources, these papers highlight the current status of the research. They will prove useful to clinicians and researchers alike, informing clinical practice and helping formulate research ideas. This volume will be of use to mental health professionals as well as those who are interested in the field of cross-cultural psychiatry.

**September 1999, Paperback, 120pp, ISBN 1 901242 31 5, £10.00**

Available from Book Sales, Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG  
Tel +44 (0) 171 235 2351 (extension 146), Fax +44 (0) 171 245 1231  
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk>