

Board of International Affairs

Pan-African Division

Quarterly newsletter

**African International Division,
Royal College of Psychiatrists**

“A WELCOME FROM THE EDITOR”

You are welcome to this edition of our Newsletter.

2008 is proving to be a very busy time for most psychiatrists and other workers in Mental Health on the continent of Africa. The issues in focus for them are not just in the principal service areas of attending to the needs of individuals who develop various syndromes of mental disorder – an already challenging enough assignment given their small numbers, but finding relevance and making an impact in the various social issues that afflict their countries.

In the course of this year, the continent of Africa has been rocked by social upheavals which necessarily affect the mental health of the people.

It is required that mental health professionals participate not just in dealing with the fallout from these matters, but in grappling with the issues themselves, helping society to understand them, and so contributing eventually, hopefully, to diminishing their incidence and impact on the people.

It is an ‘expanded’ view of the responsibilities of the mental health worker, but it is a necessary deployment of the skills and logic of the practitioner which he would withhold only at the risk of being irrelevant to his society.

I trust you will find the materials interesting reading.

Dr Olufemi Olugbile
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MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS MEETING OF THE AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS 2ND JULY 2008

The Business meeting of the African International Division took place on 2nd July, 2008, during the Annual General Meeting and Scientific Conference of the Royal College.

In Attendance

Tuviah Zabow - Chairman
Femi Olugbile - Secretary
David Ndetei
Deji Oyebode

Apologies

Frank Njenga - Treasurer
Deji Oyebode

The meeting was called to order at 11.20am.

Prof. Zabow welcomed members and friends to the meeting. He gave a summary of the outcome of the meeting of the International Division, which had taken place earlier. The salient issues that emerged centred around a need to network, expand the basis of participation in the division's activities, and generally increase the range and impact of the activities of the Division on the continent.

The issue of Brain Drain and its impact on the healthcare delivery and resources on the continent of Africa came up for vigorous discussion. It was revealed that despite its large population, Africa had only a small percentage of the world's health workers. Many of the personnel – especially doctors and nurses, who were trained locally moved out to work in the western world as soon as they got the opportunity.

David Ndetei gave a report on his experience of visiting Juba, in Sudan, recently. There he saw one medical officer taking care of a population in excess of 5 million people.

Dr Deji Oyebode disclosed that a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Royal College and the West African College of Physicians.

Dr Olugbile presented a slide show on the WPA Regional Meeting scheduled to take place in Abuja Nigeria in September 2009.

The meeting came to a close 11.45am.

REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS

Attention was again directed to the plight of hundreds of thousand of men, women and children who after being displaced from their home countries became victims of violence in South Africa – so called “xenophobia” by the media. What are the implications for the mental health services of not only the influx of the large numbers over a short period of time but of the now distressed and disorganised communities. In South Africa this has caused serious concern to the medical profession and particularly to psychiatrists.

The Colleges of Medicine of South Africa which includes the College of Psychaitrists of South Africa issued the following statement on 28 May 2008.

“The Colleges of Medicine of South Africa has observed with dismay and horror the xenophobic violence which has been manifest on an unprecedented scale over the past 2 weeks in South Africa. These brutal attacks on vulnerable, and often long established members of our communities, are abhorrent and reflect total disregard of our constitutional commitment to protect the rights of everyone who lives in South Africa. We support the involvement of many of the members of our Colleges in providing relief and support to these victims.

We also wish to state that we have developed links with many colleagues in Colleges and Universities in Africa and, as a consequence, have had the opportunities of valuable professional exchanges and the development of academic links within Africa. We wish to emphasize that we hope these will continue and expand despite the

dismal image we are currently projecting to the international community. Together with many of our fellow South Africans we have a sense of shame because of the violence. We support our leaders in their attempts to deal with this national tragedy and urge all sectors of government and civil society to do their utmost to contain, and put an end to, this wave of xenophobia in our country.'

The President of the Society of Psychiatrists of South Africa (SASOP), Dr Thambo Rangako, writing in the Society's publication, *Headline* (July 2008) (extracts).

"The issues have been variously addressed and include public health problem and make an impact on the mental health of the nation. It has been suggested by politicians that socio-economic deprivation was part of the constituents of tinder which underwent "spontaneous combustion" and resulted in the strife. Lack of adequate capacity and inadequate management resulted in lack of integration of systems with significant backlog of asylum applications. The law and order agencies are working hard to contain the violence and find out who may be behind it. The Health, Human Rights and Social Welfare sector are trying to help the displaced and bereaved. While we help the victims we must also seek ways to do secondary prevention of the Tsunami. There is an irony is how the Mozambican government is handling the issue. They have declared this a national disaster akin to the floods they experienced recently. They are mobilizing the Disaster Management Team nationally, setting up "returnees" into Reception Centers" and mobilizing the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other NGO formations to manage the people. On the South Africa side, the Mozambicans were waiting to board the buses ostensibly made available by the government for their return to motherland. Zimbabweans, on the other hand, are "between a rock and a hard place". They require urgent care and preferably along the lines that the Mozambicans are being attended."

Tuviah Zabow

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria

The Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria will be holding its 39th Annual General Meeting and Scientific Conference in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria from 25th – 29th November, 2008. The theme of the conference is 'Violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria'.

WPA Regional Meeting

All arrangements are in place to ensure that the WPA Regional Conference taking place in Abuja, Nigeria from September 26th-29th, 2009 is a great success. A Professional Conference Organiser with a background both in professional organisation and tourism has been appointed for the event, in order to guarantee a truly memorable event. The conference website will soon be launched. The theme of the conference is 'Scaling Up And Reaching Down – Addressing Unmet Need for Service'

GENERAL INFORMATION

Subscription information for College Members

All members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists who live and work in countries classed as Band C or D (which include most African countries) according to the World Bank criteria, can apply for their annual subscription rate to be reduced to £30 if their monthly income in 2008 is below £1,000.

To apply for this rate, or a refund for overpayment in 2008 interested members need to download an application form from the College Website

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/PDF/LAMI%20countries%20REDUCED%20Rate%20application%20form%202008w.pdf> and return it to the Membership Office at the College. Alternatively, they can also request the form by sending an email to Paul O'Connor (Membership Data Manager) on poconnor@rcpsych.ac.uk

Information about what countries belong to the different categories is available on the College website.

Contributions & comments to femi_olugbile@yahoo.com