

medical doctors' expertise. The Royal College of Psychiatrists should take this issue up with its members.

- 1 Craddock N, Antebi D, Attenburrow M-J, Bailey A, Carson A, Cowen P, Craddock B, Eagles J, Ebmeier K, Farmer A, Fazel S, Ferrier N, Geddes J, Goodwin G, Harrison P, Hawton K, Hunter S, Jacoby R, Jones I, Keedwell P, Kerr M, Mackin P, McGuffin P, MacIntyre DJ, McConville P, Mountain D, O'Donovan MC, Owen MJ, Oyeboode F, Phillips M, Price J, Shah P, Smith DJ, Walters J, Woodruff P, Young A, Zammit S. Wake-up call for British psychiatry. *Br J Psychiatry* 2008; **193**: 6–9.

David Yeomans, Mind, Leeds, UK. Email: david.yeomans@leedspft.nhs.uk

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Craddock *et al*'s 'Wake up call for British Psychiatry'<sup>1</sup> is a timely reminder of the need for our profession to reassert its essential qualities, particularly in view of the current low recruitment rate into psychiatry from UK graduates. The Psychiatric Trainees' Committee (PTC) agrees with the observation that the medical component of psychiatry is being devalued. Indeed, this is apparent in many of the recent changes associated with psychiatric training.

The European Working Time Directive has in part contributed to reduced exposure to emergency psychiatry. This has resulted in a reduction in the recognition and management of biomedical aspects which are often key in acute psychiatric presentations. This has been exacerbated by financially stretched trusts gradually reducing the out-of-hours contribution from trainee psychiatrists in favour of cheaper alternatives.

New Ways of Working remains contentious. Specific consideration is required to ensure that postgraduate training adapts both in substance and in delivery to ensure that future psychiatrists have the necessary skills to fulfil the changing role of a consultant. Trainees are increasingly anxious that the rapid evolution of New Ways of Working has become a driver for preventing essential continued expansion in the numbers of consultant psychiatrists. Indeed, there is a growing political atmosphere suggesting that consultants will be needed less abundantly than at present.<sup>2</sup> The PTC firmly believes that the introduction of a sub-consultant grade will diminish the endpoint of training, further devalue the profession and not serve the needs of patients.

These issues, alongside the changes resulting from Modernising Medical Careers and the significant stresses of the Medical Training Application Service, are contributing to a cohort of trainees who perceive that they are not in a valued profession.

We believe that the new competency-based framework of psychiatric training, if robustly quality-assured, offers a solid opportunity to reassert the training needs of future psychiatrists, especially in regard to their unique medical expertise in the assessment and treatment of mental disorders. However, the current changes within mental health services threaten to undervalue our role as medical specialists. This is likely to further alienate medical undergraduates and compound the current recruitment crisis.

Urgent work needs to be done by our profession to re-engage with both the government and the public as a whole to ensure that the essential contribution psychiatrists make in providing a high-quality mental health service to our patients is not further devalued.

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Walters J, Woodruff P, Young A, Zammit S. Wake-up call for British psychiatry. *Br J Psychiatry* 2008; **193**: 6–9.

- 2 NHS Employers. The future of the medical workforce (<http://www.nhsemployers.org/workforce/workforce-2193.cfm>). NHS Employers, 2007.

Ollie White, Psychiatric Trainees' Committee, Royal College of Psychiatrists, London, UK. Email: olliewhite@mac.com

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One cheer at least for Craddock *et al*'s<sup>1</sup> polemic. Critical of the de-medicalisation and role-diffusion which they see as characterising contemporary British psychiatry, they argue that those with severe mental illnesses are best served by an initial consultation with a professional with the diagnostic skills of the consultant psychiatrist. Without such an intervention, they claim, the patient is likely to be psychopharmacologically disadvantaged, possible physical disorders may be overlooked and scientific advances not brought to bear on their illness.

Nevertheless a neutral observer might be tempted to see their 'wake-up call' as a tendentious attempt to regain hegemony by the psychiatric establishment. Their *ad hominem* 'thought experiment' – inviting readers to ask themselves whether they would be happy for 'a member of their family' to be cared for under the 'distributed responsibility' model – seems unworthy of such illustrious academics, a hostage to the possibility that many will take the contrary view. The two absent cheers are for the missing psychosocial components of Mayer's bio-psychosocial triad, first proposed a century ago, midway between Reil<sup>2</sup> and Craddock *et al*. Indeed, that lack exemplifies the narrowness of vision which has arguably led to the very crisis which they bemoan. Nowhere do the authors consider the social forces driving de-professionalisation: the need to contain burgeoning healthcare budgets; flattening of social hierarchies, with leadership to be earned rather than role-bestowed; and technology-driven fragmentation of care.

Understanding these processes, and knowing how to work productively with the rivalries and distortions they create, is essential to the psychiatrist's repertoire as the latest psychopharmacology update. Nor are these issues confined to psychiatry, not excluding the cardiology model so dear to their hearts. The good general physician who takes an overview of a whole patient, including psychological aspects, and is not merely a technical expert in the minutiae of a malfunctioning organ, is as rare a species as the putative 'superlative' psychiatrist.

Craddock *et al*'s view of the science relevant to psychiatry is similarly limited, confining itself to molecular biology and neuroscience. There is no mention of recent advances in developmental psychopathology<sup>3</sup> which illuminate the psychological deficits of psychiatric illness, and the interpersonal skills needed by therapists to ameliorate them, or of psychotherapy process–outcome research which is beginning to tell us which kinds of therapy work best for which kinds of condition and personality. Waking up is the instant when dreams momentarily enter consciousness. Behind their grumpy growling, Craddock *et al*'s reverie sounds like regressive nostalgia for an idealised past with which it is hard not to feel sympathetic, but is devoid of plans – as opposed to wishes – for the future.

A more hopeful straw in the wind is the recent Royal Colleges of Psychiatry and General Practitioners joint document on psychological therapies.<sup>4</sup> This argues the case for structured training in psychosocial skills for psychiatrists and general practitioners. Craddock *et al* might consider the possibility that a psychotherapeutically informed psychiatrist – whose abilities