

The Royal College Of Psychiatrists

David Jones

The *Royal College of Psychiatrists*, or simply the *College of Psychiatrists*, is one of the Medical Royal Colleges responsible for the education, training and standards of practice among doctors in the UK. The *College of Psychiatrists* evolved from the *Association of Medical Officers of Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane* which was formed in 1841. Later on it changed its name to the *Medico Psychological Association*. In 1926 it became, by Royal Charter of Incorporation, the *Royal Medico Psychological Association*. In 1971 it became the *College of Psychiatrists*.

Psychiatrists are Doctors

Psychiatrists are doctors of medicine who usually work in NHS hospitals specialising in treating people with mental health problems. They diagnose what type of mental illness a patient has and prescribe treatment involving mood-altering drugs and ECT (electro-convulsive therapy) as well as psychotherapy. Mental illnesses and their symptoms are described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* currently in its fourth edition. Psychiatrists usually work with community psychiatric nurses, counsellors, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers, art therapists and others in the helping and caring professions or, as some of them are called in the 1960 Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act, 'professions supplementary to medicine.'

Training...

Psychiatrists spend 5 years at medical school to qualify as a doctor. They then spend a year in general medicine before starting their psychiatric training. It takes another 7 years of training and working in the psychiatric service, as well as passing two examinations run by the College, before they are ready to become a consultant psychiatrist.

Psychiatrists specialise in one or more types of mental health problem such as Learning Disability, Childhood and Adolescence, Old Age, Forensic, Substance Abuse etc. Some specialise in Psychotherapy with individuals, couples and families. The College requirements for training in psychotherapy are currently based on the psychodynamic approach. In the past, experiential or humanistic groups for patients in medical settings were usually run by occupational therapists and art therapists. In future, whilst remaining broad-based, the training of psychiatrists who specialise in psychotherapy will be differentiated into three specialisms: psychodynamic, systems and cognitive-behavioural. Humanistic approaches are likely to be a minority interest among psychiatrists. Most psychiatrists probably take the view that their training in medicine and psychiatric illness will have made them 'good detectives, able to talk to people about their family, relationship or social problems'(RCP Education

Department leaflet). They often do this without a formal training which would require them to look at how their own motives and defences, patterns of thought, feelings and relationships pattern their treatment of patients.

.....and Remuneration

A consultant psychiatrist is paid around £60,000 a year and some also have a private practice for which they will charge at least £40 an hour and, especially in London, up to £120 an hour.

College Responsibilities

The *College of Psychiatry* promotes scientific research into mental illness. It approves teaching hospitals which train psychiatrists and runs in-service refresher courses for psychiatrists after they have qualified. It supports the publication of research studies in professional journals; advises government departments and other organisations on mental health topics; and, through its public education department, promotes understanding of psychiatry among the public especially through the media.

There are more than 8,000 members of the College of Psychiatrists, including those resident overseas, and 75 administrative staff. Policy decisions are taken by a Court and a Council which are made up of elected members. These are supported by some 80 committees most of whose members are elected.

MIND

MIND is an organisation which seeks to represent the interests of people with mental health problems independently of psychiatry. By and large it enjoys good relations with the College but it is also one of the best informed and most active critics of mainstream psychiatry. The 1960s and 1970s saw attacks on psychiatry

from the 'counter culture' led, to a large extent, by the books and workshops of R.D. Laing, himself a psychiatrist and a member of the College. He accused psychiatrists, among other things, of 'maintaining the bodies of schizophrenics whilst murdering their minds.' By 1975 it was hard to find a psychiatrist who had not been influenced in some way by Laing. Thomas Szasz has written many books arguing that the concept of mental illness, and the practice of psychiatry to alleviate it, are invalid extensions of the medical model of bodily functioning. His ideas are not usually taken very seriously by psychiatrists who have statutory obligations to care for people who are not amenable to 'talking cures' and who may be a danger to themselves and others. Szasz's view that such people should be dealt with solely by the legal system fails to take account of those people who do not clearly belong in hospital or in prison (where in any case the prescription of psychiatric drugs is extensive).

Address

The Royal College of Psychiatrists Education Department may be contacted at 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG. There are also offices in Edinburgh and Dublin whose addresses may be obtained from the London office.

David Jones is a Chartered Psychologist. He is a graduate of the Karuna Institute, holds the IDHP Diploma in Humanistic Psychology, has experience in all the approaches to Psychotherapy recognised by UKCP (and some that are not), has been psychoanalysed. He was University Teacher of Psychology for many years and is now in private practice as a psychotherapist. He edited Innovative Therapy: A Handbook for the Open University Press and was the commissioning editor for Self and Society.