



World Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

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"Psychiatry is the MOST exciting and challenging and intellectually stimulating medical specialty..."

Professor Dinesh Bhugra

Interview with Prof. Dinesh Bhugra, the Presiden-Elect of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA).

First of all, we would like to thank you for finding the time to be interviewed by "World Child and Adolescent Psychiatry," WPA Child Psychiatry Section's official journal. We would like to use this opportunity once more to congratulate you on winning the Presidential election in 2011.

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: Many thanks for your very kind invitation. I am looking forward to working closely across sections and ensuring that psychiatry in all its forms is recognized around the globe as a major medical specialty and that we can get the best and the brightest trainees into our specialty. These are really exciting times for our profession on a number of fronts.



How are you as President-Elect preparing for your term in office?

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: As a newcomer to the organization I am learning about the structures, roles and responsibilities of committees and individuals as well as the mission of the organization. Coming at it from outside is a great advantage in that I come with very few prejudices and pre-conceived ideas. I am familiarizing myself with rules of procedures and regulations as well as global issues. In this stage of learning and understanding various processes, very many individuals have been extremely helpful and have been advising me and supporting me as well as mentoring me informally. I have been observing colleagues who have much more experience in the organization and learning from them, and I have been meeting new friends and renewing old friendships. WPA has a major role as an organization that provides added value to the national bodies.

When you were going for the post, you had a very clear agenda. Would you mind sharing with our readers what your plans are?

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: I am convinced that we must learn from each other. In many countries, in spite of limited resources, services are superb, and in others, innovative methods of service delivery are being used. I would like to create a repository of all such information so that wheel does not need to be reinvented. I am very interested in LAMI (low- and middle-income countries') needs and therefore plan to create policy, training and research-based hubs from where individuals and organizations can get information (e.g. access policy documents, make research links and have easy access to curricula in psychiatry for trainees, medical students and other mental and health professionals). This means collecting existing documents from all the organizations and creating a web-based library.

My other major interest is public mental health, and I would like to have five columns within the overarching structure: these will include gender related mental health especially dealing with domestic, physical and sexual violence; child and adolescent mental health; mental health of prisoners; minority mental health such as those of migrants, indigenous groups, LGBT groups; and mental health promotion and prevention of these policies.



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Interview with Prof. Dinesh Bhugra: (cont.)

You have a special interest in cross cultural psychiatry, which is a very important topic. However, these days biological psychiatry attracts more organizational funding and more interest from young people? How do you feel about all this, and what do you think the future holds for psychiatry as a science and as a discipline?

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: To my mind psychiatry is the MOST exciting and challenging and intellectually stimulating medical specialty. We must attract bright enthusiastic trainees who can lead the research agenda as well as develop and deliver services that patients and their families will be happy to use. Research interests and funding always swing from one end of the spectrum to the other. What we need to do is to mentor young and early career psychiatrists in LAMI countries (low- and middle-income countries) where there is an urgent need for culturally appropriate services informed by appropriate research.

As a cultural psychiatrist I am fully aware of cultural relativism and know that one size does not fit all, and in any service planning and delivery we must take into account cultural variations. We must not blindly follow one model or the other but modify it according to cultural norms and resources. Psychiatry is at that stage where a lot of exciting developments are emerging.

Our understanding of the brain is increasing on a daily basis, and psychopharmacogenomics, neuroscience of emotions, and therapies without therapists are all exciting developments. We must have the courage of our convictions to stand up proudly and take pride in what we do. We care for complex vulnerable patients in difficult circumstances and in the face of pervasive stigma.

We must take pride in our profession. Psychiatry is at that stage where general medicine was a century ago, and that is what makes these stimulating times especially for the younger generation, who will have exciting and wonderful opportunities to take the specialty further.

In the past you emphasized that LAMI countries (low- and middle-income countries) must get their fair share of support. How can this goal be achieved, and what can WPA sections do to support this goal?

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: There are many ways of supporting LAMI countries through joint research activities that help them to develop research capacity; through educational exchanges and support; through training and leadership skills workshops; and through mentoring programmes.

Sections within the WPA have the necessary expertise and should deliver this expertise to the places where it is needed the most. These actions need to be translated into policy development and educational packages. Bearing in mind that these countries are some of the poorest, practitioners will find that working with local organizations to find the best way to engage patients, their families and policy makers is one of the key ways forward. WPA provides added value and support to the organizations locally and provides networks of support to help practitioners avoid burn-out. In addition, freer exchange of human resources in terms of ideas, training and observation will help considerably.

Sections have to work both longitudinally in supporting their members but also across sections, so that various components can come together to make a difference. Sections need to be proactive and creative in their approaches.



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Interview with Prof. Dinesh Bhugra: (cont.)

Increasingly, allied professionals are playing more and more important roles in psychiatry: psychologists are leading state-of-the-art research projects in mental health, and managers are replacing clinical directors. You are an expert in leadership and have published many papers on this topic. Do you think there is a potential risk that psychiatrists will just become "prescription writers?"

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: That will happen only if we allow it to happen. Psychiatry is the only profession that deals with biopsychosocial models of etiology and management; other professions have one of the three disciplines and specialized knowledge and skills pertaining to that field. Most importantly psychiatrists need to take the lead in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services, and they need to be the agents of change. Leadership is never given, it has to be deserved and earned. Psychiatrists have the training and the experience as well as the skills and knowledge to understand the patient's developmental history and their internal world as well as their world view, so we need to use these skills for the benefit of our patients by developing and delivering services that patients and their families will be able to use.

The WPA Child and Adolescent Psychiatry section is working very hard to promote child and adolescent psychiatry. How could we do so more effectively?

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: It needs to focus on developmental aspects of an individual across all age spans. All psychiatrists must learn about the developmental aspects of the individual no matter what their sub-specialty is. Development does not stop because an individual reaches legal age of adulthood. The section must enable WPA to develop an understanding of early interventions, not only in psychoses, but also addictions, personality disorders, depression etc. Transitions between different age groups need to be made easily navigable for the patients and their families. Furthermore, the section needs to work across sections to develop public mental health programmes. We know that nearly half of all adult psychiatric disorders will start under the age of 14, so engaging schools, parents and teachers is something the section must do. There is also convincing epidemiological evidence to suggest that three-quarters of psychiatric disorders in adulthood start between the ages of 14 and 24 so we must look at transitions and developmental aspects of psychiatry. Working with children and adolescents, their teachers as well as parents and families to educate them about the impact of abuse, smoking and unhealthy habits is something the section needs to take on board.

You are great fan of Hindi cinema and have explored the portrayal of mental illness in cinema. What movies do you recommend for a child and adolescent psychiatrist to watch?

Professor Dinesh Bhugra: Each individual will have his/her own preferred movies. I have used various films from Hollywood as well as Bollywood but also from broader European cinema at various times and they keep changing regarding what is new and interesting. One of the things that may be useful is to get the students or the audiences to identify which film they like and what aspects of that film have aroused their curiosity especially in the domains of mental illness and mental health.

Professor Dinesh Bhugra was interviewed by Dr. Norbert Skokauskas (Ireland) and Professor Anthony Guerrero (USA).