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Evolutionary theory: Medicine's neglected basic science

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Despite the fact that Darwinian theory is now the overarching and organizing principle for all biological sciences, medicine (including psychiatry) has remained resolutely pre-Darwinian. As a result, evolutionary theory does not feature in undergraduate or postgraduate curricula in the majority of medical schools world-wide nor is evolution taught in higher medical or psychiatric training programs. I will argue that this a serious omission and will present evidence to show how psychiatry and medicine in general are hampered by this neglect. I will argue that human mental as well as bodily systems are the products of evolutionary processes and that this fact has major consequences for thinking about and understanding function and dysfunction of the human brain/mind. I will also argue that without taking an evolutionary prespective our attempts to understand mental disorder will at best be incomplete. I will further demonstrate that viewing mental disorder through an evolutionary lens can generate insights that would otherwise not be possible.

Biography

Riadh Abed is a retired Psychiatrist. He is a Medical Director and Hon Senior Clinical Lecturer. He worked in the British NHS as a Consultant for 25 years and Medical Director in South Yorkshire. He has a longstanding interest in the application of evolutionary thinking to understand mental ill-health and mental disorder and has published a number of novel evolutionary theoretical formulations on eating disorders, OCD and schizophrenia. He is founding Chair of the Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group at the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the UK and also Secretary of the Section of Evolutionary Psychiatry at the WPA. He is currently a Medical Member of the Mental Health Tribunals, Ministry of Justice in England.

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