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Dr. Olufemi Olugbile
Vice Chair:
Prof David Ndetei**

FROM THE EDITOR

Our readers are welcome to the mid-year edition of the Newsletter.

A lot of things have happened in the period since the last Newsletter. For one thing, Africa lost one of its doyens in the Mental Health field, in the person of Professor Tolani Asuni.

Then there was the Annual General Meeting and Scientific Conference of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Brighton, an exciting experience capped with a meeting with the new President of Royal College, Professor Sue Bailey.

And then there was a conference of Psychotrauma in Nairobi Kenya. No continent on earth requires more knowledge and resources on psychological trauma than Africa, a continent which is even now still ravaged by the effects of conflicts and natural disasters. For one week, 550 conference participants deliberated on the subject of Psychotrauma. A whole session was devoted to the difficulties encountered by journalists in reporting disaster situations.

In this edition, we bring you brief reports on every one of these events. There is a biographical sketch of Professor Tolani Asuni., and snippets drawn from his autobiography – a volume quaintly titled 'Memoirs Of A Good Bad Boy'.

Enjoy it.

OLUFEMI OLUGBILE

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS MEETING - FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

The 2011 Annual Scientific Conference of Psychiatrists took place in the beautiful city of Brighton from 28th June to 1st July 2011. It provided numerous opportunities for colleagues working in Africa to listen to the latest developments in Mental Health, and also participate in discussion of the results of cutting edge research in various aspects of Mental Health, especially brain research.

The programme was rich, with the spotlight being shone on various topics of current interest in research and practice.

The conference was also an opportunity for psychiatrists practising in Africa to meet their colleagues living and working in the Diaspora. It presented the perfect opportunity to renew old friendships, and explore areas of joint interest. There was a meeting of the heads of the International Divisions which focused on reports of activities in various areas, and plans for the future.

The African Division was represented at the Brighton conference by its Chairman, Dr. Olufemi Olugbile and his Vice Chair Prof. David M. Ndetei. Both would like to appreciate the efforts of the College in creating and nurturing the International Divisions. They would also like to thank Elen Cook for her personal

efforts in ensuring their comfort during the Brighton conference, and for her general assistance to the African Division, including facilitating the distribution of the Division's Newsletter.

It is the hope of the leadership of the African Division that as the years go on, more and more psychiatrists practising in Africa will be able to attend the Annual Meeting of the College and participate fully in the intellectual engagement.

David Ndetei

A MEETING WITH PROFESSOR SUE BAILEY – THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

The Chairman of the Africa Division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Dr. Olufemi Olugbile accompanied by his Vice Chairman, Prof. David M. Ndetei held a meeting with the newly installed President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. This meeting took place on Friday 1st July 2011 at the conference venue.

In the course of the meeting, the President was briefed on how several medical schools from across Africa had participated in the College's survey of Medical students attitudes to Psychiatry. The data entry was being finalized at Africa Mental Health Foundation (AMHF) and would be forwarded to the College within July 2011. Professor Bailey expressed her delight at the news, and stated that she would like the College to be more involved in the mental health activities in Africa. The Chairman responded positively to this idea, and promised that potential collaborative activities would be identified and put forward. Mention was made of the newly launched Association of Volunteers, a body of people who are willing to offer their expertise and time to deserving communities and countries.

The meeting ended on a warm and friendly note. The conclusion of the African team was that there was much cause for optimism about the future of the relationship between the College and the African International Division.

(Anyone interested in seeking information about the Association of Volunteers may get in touch with Elen Cook of the College ECook@rcpsych.ac.uk)

THE NAIROBI CONFERENCE ON PSYCHOTRAUMA

The 4th Regional Conference on Psychotrauma was held in Nairobi from 11th to 15th July 2011. The venue was the Catholic University of East and Central Africa, a beautiful campus in one of the suburbs of Nairobi. This was the second year running that the conference would be taking place on the same campus.

The conference was funded by the Peter C. Alderman Foundation (PCAF). The Alderman family lost their son Peter in the bombing of the World Trade Centre towers in New York. They decided to seek healing for themselves through healing others who are psycho-traumatized and hurting as a result of political or other events. The founders of the Foundation, Liz and Stephen Alderman and their executive officer Alison Pavia were in attendance.

The Conference attracted participants from 20 countries from Africa, North and South America, Europe and Asia. The participants were just about 550. Of particular interest were several participants from South Sudan, a nation which has just attained independence. The participants congratulated and appreciated them by joining in the singing of the National Anthem of the World's newest country.

The programme was very rich, with 6 parallel sessions in addition to the plenaries. There were three scientific sessions from Monday to Thursday both morning and afternoon (except Tuesday afternoon), one parallel session for the Media, another special parallel programme for the Somalis to talk about their issues, and a sixth parallel programme for training on Psychotrauma for the PCAF staff working in Uganda. There were also special interest group meetings for the Armed Forces and groups that focused on special interests of the different countries in East Africa, all related to Psychotrauma.

On the morning of Friday 15th, the plenary was run entirely by the Media. They highlighted the plight of journalists as they report disasters and other traumatic events.

All through the conference the theme was "African Solutions to African Problems". It was exciting and gratifying how the speakers from various backgrounds tailor made their various inputs to identify problems in Africa, and also to suggest sustainable solutions to these challenges.

A noteworthy feature was the interest shown by the participants. All the 550 people attended consistently from the beginning to the end of the conference. Activities of each day were completed before the end of that day.

Of special interest amongst other activities was the trip to a pilot rural community mental health programme, located about 250 kilometers South East of Nairobi. This took place on 15th and 16th July 2011. This is a pilot project run by Africa Mental Health Foundation (AMHF). It brings together all stakeholders in mental health in that community to identify and address barriers to the narrowing of the treatment gap in mental health, using resources available in the community. These stakeholders include health workers, faith and traditional healers, and community opinion leaders such as administrators and teachers.

PROFESSOR TOLANI ASUNI (6.1.1924- 21.6.2011)

In the month of June, 2011, Africa lost one of its most illustrious psychiatrists.

Tolani Asuni was born in central Lagos on the sixth of January, 1924 into a small family with a typically large network of

extended family relationships. From all accounts he was a rambunctious youth with a penchant for displaying careless brilliance, and defying established order. The title of his memoirs, published in 2009 - 'Memoirs of a Good Bad Boy' comes from an incident in which a Civil Servant who had observed him on his escapades offered him the assessment that he was a 'bad boy', and he would amount to no good. It gave him great pleasure to go up to this man on the eve of his departure for the United Kingdom, to inform him that he had been offered a place to study Medicine in Trinity College, Dublin. 'You are a good bad boy', the older man conceded.

For some reason, this description of himself seemed to make a powerful impression on Tolani Asuni. Indeed his life-story is a remarkable tale of powerful insights and frequent displays of unconventional behaviour.

In 1945, at the tail end of the Second World War, he set out by sea with a group of other youths to study Medicine in Dublin. There were already a certain number of Nigerians that he knew studying and working in places like Liverpool, Edinburgh and Dublin, and he took pains to link up with familiar faces in order to prevent feeling a sense of alienation.

His bent for psychological issues was evident from his student days in Dublin. He joined the Monkstown Group, a Saturday evening group run by Jonathan Hanaghan, a man who had been psychoanalysed by someone who had himself been analysed by Sigmund Freud. The group met regularly to discuss matters of Philosophy and Psychology. It stuck in Tolani's mind that participating in such a group helped people to transcend some of the shibboleths of their environment. He could recall how a member - an Irishman, celebrated the fact that he was able to attend a Protestant Church for the funeral service of a friend of his, despite the strict injunction of his Catholic Church against having anything to do with Protestants or their places of worship.

Among his adventurous forays during his student days was a bicycle tour of France with a fellow student, and an expedition to the Northwest Territory of Ireland in a rickety car with a group of his mates.

On graduating and concluding his horsemanship at the Royal City of Dublin Hospital, he took up an appointment at General Hospital, Lagos in 1953. There followed a succession of postings to places such as Oyo and Shagamu. In 1955, he was posted to Badagry, a riverine community on the western edge of Nigeria.

A chance meeting at the Badagry beach with Dr Adeoye Lambo, the first Nigerian psychiatrist who had by then taken up appointment at the Aro Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Abeokuta led to an offer of sponsorship for postgraduate training in Psychiatry. He accepted the offer, and he was posted to Aro to work with Lambo to gain experience. When Lambo travelled to conduct a study on Nigerian students in the UK, Dr Raymond Prince from Canada came over to hold fort, and Asuni worked under him for one year, a period that was recognised as part of his training when he eventually got to the Institute of Psychiatry, Maudsley in 1957. The teachers who made a powerful impression on him at the Maudsley included Sir Aubrey Lewis and Dr Linford Rees. Since his studies antedated the creation of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the qualifications he obtained from this era were the Diploma of Psychological Medicine, and an MD, for which he wrote a thesis on Child Psychiatry.

In 1960, he returned to Aro. It was at this time that Dr Leighton and his colleagues came over and formed a team with him and Dr Lambo to carry out the Aro-Cornell study. The result was published in the 1963 book 'Psychiatric Disorder Among the Yoruba'.

Asuni played a principal role in organising the 1st Pan-African Psychiatric Conference which was hosted in Abeokuta in 1961 by Lambo. It was an audacious venture, as Abeokuta had no formal hospitality resources of any sort at the time. Foreign visitors were accommodated in the hospital and in people's homes in town. It was a massively successful conference that helped to place Aro on the world map of Psychiatry. In attendance were Prof Aubrey Lewis, Prof Russell Brain, Prof Alex Leighton, and a rich selection of psychiatrists from across the globe, as well as virtually all the psychiatrists practising in Africa.

Asuni presented a paper on 'Suicide in Africa' which was so well received that Aubrey Lewis took him aside and said 'I hope you will publish it, and not in an obscure journal'.

The paper was eventually published, without change, in the British Medical Journal in 1962.

For Asuni various honours followed.

The Association of Psychiatrists in Africa was inaugurated in Mauritius in 1970. Asuni was elected its first President. In the same year, he became the Associated Secretary of the World Psychiatric Association in Mexico City.

He was a Chief Collaborating Officer in the WHO-sponsored International Pilot Study of Schizophrenia.

In 1971, he organised a workshop of the new Association of Psychiatrists in Africa in Abeokuta on the theme 'Psychosis in Africa'.

He became a member of the UN Committee on Crime Prevention and Control.

In 1978, he was appointed Director of United Nations Social Defence Research Institute in Rome.

He continued to be active in the prosecution of his passions beyond his retirement from the academic community. He volunteered his service for the running of the Majidun Rehabilitation Centre, a centre on the outskirts of Lagos built for the treatment and rehabilitation of roadside destitutes, many of whom suffer from psychiatric syndromes. He also gave his support to NGOs working in the areas of Drug Abuse, Disability and Criminology.

The launching of his memoirs in 2009 was a major event in Lagos, presenting an opportunity for a younger generation of Nigerian psychiatrists to meet and interact with Tolani Asuni and to show their sense of the debt of gratitude they owed to him as a teacher and mentor. He had not lost any of the sparkle, and there was still a glint of the rebellious streak.

Tolani Asuni died on the 21st of June, 2011. He was buried in Lagos according to Muslim rites two days later. On the 28th of June, 2011, a Celebration of Life was held in his honour at the Yoruba Tennis Club, Lagos.

May his soul rest in peace.

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