

Transcultural psychiatry



Special interest group



Transcultural Psychiatry Special Interest Group (TSIG)

Newsletter, Autumn 2021



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Message from the TSIG Chair

Dear all,

As the chair of the transcultural psychiatry group, this newsletter cannot be complete without acknowledging the huge contribution of my predecessor Dr Shahid Latif, who led as a chair and created an executive group of wonderful people. Shahid's endless energy and his ability to bring people together has set the path for me to take over as chair of the TSIG. Thank you so much Shahid, for everything you have done and for keep on contributing with our group. Also I'd like to thank our previous financial officer, Dr Sarwat Nowrose, whose work was also fundamental for the development of our beloved TSIG.

As a group we learnt and shared the expertise and experiences of transcultural psychiatry across countries, in our networking events, discussions, regional events by members, and our conferences were a huge success. We learnt that transcultural psychiatry continues to evolve. Transcultural psychiatry transcends all aspects of psychiatry and this is a discussion the executive members and I would like to take

further at all levels of the college and have your views. How can we all together really achieve the best outcomes for our patients across all cultures? How can we as clinicians continue to be curious, learn, improve and understand prejudices, discrimination. How can we all truly understand each other and our patients with all our diverse experiences and backgrounds.

This group is on a journey that will continue to shape and evolve and make whatever positive differences we can along the way. I would also like to thank all the previous executive committee members who made huge contributions and welcome the new members. We are also keen to help and support the college in all the strategies to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes for patients and colleagues and be as sustainable as we need to be. We are keen to hear from everyone in the group on your ideas and hope you will attend and consider contributing to our annual conference which will be in March 2022.

Dr Fabida Aria



Notes from the editor

I think we can argue that when the COVID-19 pandemic first began, no one could foresee how our lives would change, how we would go from meeting regularly with everyone face to face, to, in some cases, living a virtual life, in which we only meet with others via a communication device. However, things have slowly started to change, just this month, both the BIPA and the BPPA held their first face to face events, which were attended by many keen excited to be able to finally connect with colleagues and friends.

Although things have started to go back to “normal”, one thing that remains being an issue, but which the pandemic helped highlight, is the problem of racism and discrimination within the NHS. Recent data has shown that staff from BAME, many of whom come from different countries and cultures, are not only less likely to be hired or promoted, but they are also more likely to be bullied and disciplined, compared with their white counterparts. Because of this, many different organisations, including the RCPsych have tried to support, or include in their agenda, different initiatives to help tackle this issue. However,

there is still a long way to go. So, the TSIG will continue raising awareness not only about the impact of racism and discrimination on the NHS staff and the patients we treat, but also about the positive influence a culturally diverse staff can bring to any organisation.

In this newsletter you will learn more about all the activities the TSIG and its members have engaged with over the last year, including our annual conference which took place online in February this year, but which we hope next year, we’ll be able to have face to face. I hope you find this edition interesting and inspiring, as once again, we would like to encourage you to contribute for our following issues. We strongly believe that diversity and co-production can only enrich any group, mainly one focused on transcultural psychiatry. So, we would like to invite you to share your thoughts on any cultural aspect that you consider can influence psychiatry and more importantly, the mental health and wellbeing of our patients.

Dr Emmeline Lagunes-Cordoba



Past TSIG activities 2021

TSIG Annual Conference February 8th & 9th 2021, RCPsych



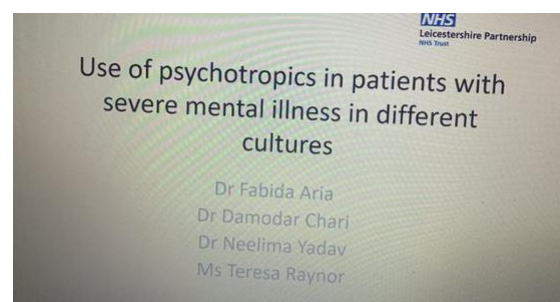
Like everyone else, this year the TSIG had to adapt to our “new normality”, so our 2021 annual conference was held online on the 8th and 9th of February. The conference was opened by the RCPsych’s president, Dr Adrian James, who talked about the steps taken by the College to reduce racism and discrimination, including the College’s Equality Action Plan.



The first session, chaired by Dr Imran Malik, included two brilliant talks by professor Dinesh Bhugra and Dr Afzal Javed. Professor Bhugra talked about the challenges of taking in consideration individual’s culture, backgrounds and differences, when assessing people and understanding their values. While the president of the World Psychiatric Association, Dr Javed, talked about the challenges and opportunities to work in a global mental health scale. His talk not only focused on discussing the treatment gaps between physical and mental disorders, but also the variations in teaching, training and curriculum developments across the world.

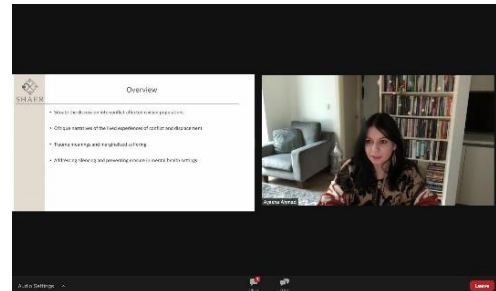


The second session started with Drs Donna Arya and Hasanen Al-Taiar talking about sentencing of ethnic minorities in forensic psychiatry, and was followed by Dr Fabida Aria talking use of psychotropic medication in patients with severe mental illness in different cultures and ethnicities. Later on Dr Emmeline Lagunes-Cordoba talked about the impact of cultural and traditional festivities in people’s mental health. Thoquer Hussain, Karishma Tailor and Josh O’Shaughnessy ended this session by talking about the impact of becoming a refugee on mental health. While Dr Trudi Seneviratne finalise the day with the closing remarks.

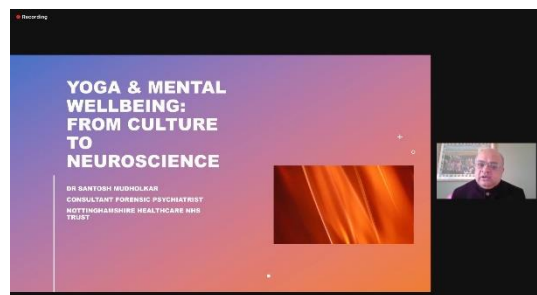




We were welcome the second day by our past chair Dr Shahid Latif and the RCPsych's CEO Paul Rees, who recognised the importance of having an inclusive college which celebrate diversity and multiculturalism. On this day, the first session, chaired by Dr Hanif Soomro, had Professor Kam Bhui talking about racial inequalities and its impact on people with severe mental illness; and Aliza Ayaz discussing the results of a study looking into the relationship between ethnicity and occupational classes with mental health in the UK.



The second session started with an amazing talk by Dr Ayesha Ahmad on the transcultural considerations when disclosing war related trauma. This was followed by Dr Santosh Mudholkar reminding us of all the benefits of practicing yoga and how this can help us improve our wellbeing and mental health. Dr Gbonjubola Abiri followed by talking about confronting the culture of silence through social media; while Dr Saadia Muzaffar finalised the day talking about the importance of culturally adapting psychotherapies for psychosis in low and middle income countries. Our TSIG annual conference was closed by the RCPsych's Dean, Dr Kate Lovett, who acknowledged how our different cultures and backgrounds can help us provide a better quality of care to our patients.



South Asian History month

Since last year, the RCPsych declared August as South Asian History month. To celebrate the occasion, this year, members of the TSIG group participated in different events to remind us the importance of South Asian culture in British psychiatry.

First, TSIG Chair, Dr Fabida Aria, wrote a beautiful blog in which she shared the story of her parents and their journey from Kerala to Oman, and her personal story that took her from Bangalore in India, to Leicester in the UK, where she currently works as a consultant psychiatrist and associate medical director. You can still read her lovely blog here: [South Asian History Month: Dr Fabida Aria \(rcpsych.ac.uk\)](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/south-asian-history-month/dr-fabida-aria)

As part of South Asia History month, Dr Santosh Mudholkar was interviewed by Ella Marchant, Director of Digital communication, RCPsych. In this interview, Dr Mudholkar highlighted the positive influence of art and music on brain for mental well-being. He introduced traditional Indian instruments such as sitar, tabla and flute. He advocated access to asian music to mental health service users for mental well-being particularly during these unprecedented times of covid-19 pandemic. You can listen to Dr Mudholkar's podcast by clicking on the link.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/music-art-and-the-brain-for-south-asian-history-month/id1440489120?i=1000530032567>

Music, Art And The Brain For South Asian History Month
The Royal College of Psychiatrists Podcast

Science

[Listen on Apple Podcasts](#)



South Asian History Month: Systemic Racism and How to Tackle it

Dr Shahid Latif, former chair of the TSIG, and Dr Saadia Muzaffar also participated in South Asian History Month speaking on a series of webinar organised by the RCPsych to celebrate this event. Dr Latif, along with Dr Raj Mohan, Dr Sri Kalidini and Professor Kam Bhui, talked about speaking up, acknowledging and changing systemic racism in the NHS, you can watch this talk here:

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/events/free-webinars/free-webinars-for-members/south-asian-history-month-systemic-racism>. While Dr Muzaffar, along with Dr Ananta Dave, Dr Irfan Akhtar and Professor Dinesh Bhugra, talked about the impact and challenges of COVID-19 on South Asian doctors in mental health trusts, click here to watch this talk: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/events/free-webinars/free-webinars-for-members/covid-unity-through-adversity-8-july-2021>

South Asian History Month: COVID - Unity Through Adversity

World Mental Health Day, 2021

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) International Advisory Committee and the Transcultural SIG in collaboration with the Pakistan High Commission London, marked the World Mental Health Day by organising a seminar on October 10th 2021.

The event, organised and facilitated by Dr Shahid Latif, consultant psychiatrist and executive member of the RCPsych Transcultural SIG, was hosted by the H.E High Commissioner Moazzam Ahmad Khan and Deputy High Commissioner Faisal Aziz at the High Commission in Knightsbridge. Dr Fabida Aria RCPsych Transcultural SIG Chair and other members of the executive committee were also active participant in the event, which was very well attended by individuals, notable British Pakistani psychiatrists, charities, organisations and social enterprises from the Pakistani diaspora.



Dr. Trudi Seneviratne RCPsych Registrar and Prof. Mohammad ul Uzri, RCPsych Presidential Lead for the International Advisory Committee were the keynote speakers. Dr Seneviratne spoke about the importance of working with diaspora groups and organisations in partnerships to get a better understanding of the ground realities particularly within the ethnic groups within the UK. She felt that this event was an ideal platform to foster links and network with the organisations who are involved in proactive work within the UK. Prof

Uzri and Dr Seneviratne, as well as other mental health experts, emphasized the importance of talking about mental health issues, breaking social taboos around mental health and getting professional help in a timely manner. They also spoke about how Covid-19 Pandemic had adversely impacted people's mental health adversely, causing this issue to require greater attention and resources.

In his address, the High Commissioner, pointed out lack of access to mental health services in developing countries as well as stigma in accessing the scant services available in hospitals. He emphasised the need to positively approach the mental health debate. In addition, he stressed on the need for increased investment to provide equitable mental health care for all. Dr Shahid Latif, who moderated the seminar, highlighted the importance of the interface between culture and mental health and how important it is to share cultural intelligence around mental health presentations. He also discussed the bio-psycho-social model being effective but may cater more for Western psychiatry. He stressed the importance of bio-psycho-social-cultural approach towards understanding aetiological factors around mental health which could then also be utilised in formulating more meaningful management plans.



Other events

BIPA annual conference

On November 13th and 14th 2021, The British Indian Psychiatric Association (BIPA) hold their annual conference, which this year was titled: Culture, Ethnicity and Psychiatry. The conference was host by BIPA's president, Dr Ananta Dave, include a line of great speakers including: Prof Mala Rao, Dr Rajesh Mohan, Dr Arun Kishore, Dr Gautam Saha, Prof Jame Dacre and Prof Dinesh Bhugra.



Some of the key points discussed in this conference included:

- Ethnic minorities still report lower levels of wellbeing compare with the white population.
- Just denouncing racism is not enough, we need robust system to prevent and tackle discrimination in all its forms.
- The experiences of BAME staff haven't improved, and in some cases have worsened, as up to 32% still experience bullying, harassment or abuse.
- The importance of diaspora organisations to keep on working together to train organisation to tackle discrimination and challenge inequalities.
- The importance to have cultural competent organisations which value diversity, capacity for self-assessment and are conscious of dynamics when different cultures interact.

- The need of incorporating social determinant, health inequalities and neuropsychiatry elements into the RCPsych curriculum.
- Removing inequality for LGBTQ, significantly improves mental health and hospitals visits due to physical health issues.



Save the date, BIPA's annual conference will take place next year from September 30th to October 2nd, 2022.



BBPA annual conference

On November 20th and 21st 2021, The British Pakistani Psychiatrists Association (BPPA) hold their annual conference, which this year was focused on current issues in mental health care. The conference was opened by the BPPA Chairman, Dr Qaiser Abbas Zaidi, and included some of the following speakers: Prof Saeed Farooq, Dr Samia Latif, Dr Ananta Dave, Dr Hasanen Ai-Taiar, Prof Julie Anderson, Prof Rafey Faruqi, Prof Subodh Dave, Dr Khurram Sadiqand and Dr Adrian James. There were topical discussions on Global mental health, Health and well-being of workforce post pandemic, current challenges in psychiatry training and role of gaming and media related to mental health issues. Posters were submitted by few trainees and Joel Philip, Vinu Cherian and Alexander John were awarded the best poster.



Some of the key points discussed in this conference included:

- We need more effective diverse leadership to look at any discrepancies in psychiatry and to reverse inequalities.

- Preventing inequality is key to the prevention of mental illness.
- BAME and IMGs are the backbone of the NHS, especially in psychiatry.
- However, the mental health of health professionals (especially BAME staff) was more negatively affected during the lockdown.
- Wellbeing is crucial, with healthy well supported doctors meaning healthy well supported patients.
- Presidential priorities are: Parity between physical & mental health; equality, diversity & inclusion; workforce wellbeing; and sustainability.



BBPA's annual conference will take place next year in November.



Open invitation

We welcome the work done by diaspora organisations, and we hope to have member from more diaspora organisations to share summaries of their events. We would love to add them to our newsletter to help promote the excellent work they do in the UK and abroad and help inspire our readers and learn more about transcultural psychiatry.



Culture, thoughts and words

Celebrating World Mental Health Day, 2021.

The WHO recognises Mental Health Day on 10th October every year, with the aim of raising awareness and mobilise efforts in support of mental health issues around the world. The theme of this year's World Mental Health Day was 'Mental health in an unequal world'. This year the Pakistani High Commission London UK in collaboration with RCPsych and supported by Transcultural SIG and the British Pakistani Psychiatric Association (BPPA), organised a special event to this important date. Here I talked about my experience attending this event to celebrate World Mental Health Day.



The event was welcomed by Dr Shahid Latif, Chair of BPPA. He emphasised the importance of mental health by stating *"No health without mental health"* and reminded us that 1 in 4 people in the world suffers from depression. However, he stated that mental health is not about having a diagnosis of anxiety and depression, but about learning how to deal with day-to-day emotions. Dr Latif highlighted the need of addressing stigma in different ethnicities in UK and Pakistan, as this is a major hurdle in accessing help from mental health services. He also talked about how COVID has

affected people's relationships, finances, routines, etc, which have led to increase in mental health issues. Dr Latif finalised by talking about a Task Force recently established to address stigma and look at ways to improve mental health services in Pakistan.

This introduction was followed by H.E. Mr Moazzam Ahmad Khan, High Commissioner of Pakistan in UK. He talked about how COVID, lockdown, unemployment and social isolation has changed 'stress to distress'. He added how Stigma and discrimination affect achievements and education. Mr Khan further said that about 75-95% of Pakistani population with mental disorder is unable to access mental health services and this gap is growing due to increase in population but no increase in facilities. He said that this is partly down to government's budget constraint and partly because of less appetite for such conversations. However, he added that government's 'Sehat Sahulat Programmes' are working hard to provide accessible healthcare to all Pakistanis. He reiterated the importance of increasing investment to provide quality mental health care, provision of new treatments in Pakistan and use of expertise of UK based Pakistani psychiatrists. He ended his talk by emphasising, *"There is no health without equitable mental health"*.

Professor Muhammad Al-Uzri was next. He talked about the treatment gap in Iraq which is 90%. He stated that no single association can deal with such an issue and that the RCPsych being an international organization, assists in international strategy and is very keen to know needs of the communities in the UK and abroad. Dr Gertrude Seneviratne, followed.

She talked about her journey from a student to a psychiatrist. She beautifully narrated a patient's story and described how stigma can prevent progress in recovery. She insisted to tackle stigma at conversational level because education and treatment is equally important for successful recovery of a patient. She also gave a broader view of college values 'CIRCLE' which states for courageous, innovative, respectful, collaborative and learn together to achieve excellence.

Professor Imtiaz Dogar, Chair of Pakistan Psychiatrists Association, gave us an overview of the treatment gap in Pakistan and of how stigma and misconceptions lead to compliance issues. He further added that in collaboration with BPPA further doors will open for research and fellowships. *'Earlier the intervention - better the outcome'* he reiterated. Professor Asif Rangoonwala, chair of the British Pakistani Foundation (BPF), mentioned the BPF started to help Pakistani community in education, marriage and empowering women about 10 years ago, and appreciated the Royal college for bringing everyone on one platform. Mr Naeem Raza, from the British Asian Trust, stated that they have supported more than 6.5 million people in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. He further added that there are 700 Psychiatrists in Pakistan which means 1 psychiatrist for 100,000 people which is why treatment gap is almost 90%, explaining that myths about possessions and misconception add to this restricted access to mental health services. Mr Irfan Akher, president of the APPNE, appreciated BPPA for this cause. While Dr Samina Niaz, from the Association of Pakistani Physician and Surgeons, talked about how this organization is running mobile health clinics in rural areas of Pakistan, working on

woman empowerment, public awareness on mental health and COVID vaccination.

Dr Zafar Iqbal, head of sports medicine, talked about players mental health that can be affected by their bad performance, non-selection and physical injuries leading to anxiety and depression, which would have further impact on their performance and recovery from injuries. He talked about how mental health stigma in players can affect

them when they are treated by psychiatrists, and about how performance not only depends on physical health but also on player's motivation and focus. Mr Sohail Chughtai talked about telemedicine and its success in orthopaedics and how the use of telepsychiatry can help beat stigma in psychiatry. While Saba Gillani talked on behalf of 'Better Community-Business Network'. Final closing remarks were given by Mr Faisal Khan, deputy Pakistan High Commissioner, who appreciated the work psychiatrists do and their values of sympathy, empathy and compassion.

Overall, this was an excellent event focused on bringing the RCPsych and different diaspora organisations to one platform, sharing their thoughts and finding solutions together. It was interesting to see that almost all developing countries, as well as some developed countries, face mental health stigma, but with collaboration, they can all help tackle this issue, which in consequence can help improve access to mental health services.

Dr Saadia Alvi, Registrar General Adult Psychiatry



March 23rd

*March 23rd, a year has gone but we are still here,
tired and drained, but standing the pain, standing the fear.
There are broken hearts, there are lonely souls,
there are empty arms, longing for a hug.*

*The fight has been long, it feels we have battled alone,
away from our friends, forced to face an invisible storm.
Many are gone, but many remain,
remembering those who will live in our hearts.*

*Today I look back to that time before March,
when I hugged my brother and give a kiss to my nan.
Today I look back to when all this began,
when we closed the doors and put a mask on our smiles.
Today I want to thank you for your sacrifice,
for those lonely evenings that saved many lives.*

*I know we are tired, hard to keep fighting this fight,
feeling the isolation has taken our lives apart.
I know it has been too long, hard to see things otherwise,
but despite the time lost, I have been by your side.*

*My friend, my brother, my mom, my lover,
my brave patient, my tired colleague,
that morning commuter who still keeps on going.
Whether two meters apart, or separated by oceans and lands,
we have fought together for that life we once shared in our time.*

*So, today on this day, a year apart from when this battle began,
let's honour those gone but remember that despite our loss,
there's a world that will celebrate that expected moment
when we'll go back to hold in each other's arms.*



Dr Emmeline Lagunes-Cordoba

Healing in the Dark: How Pakistani MHPs are taking a stand for gender and sexual minorities

In late 2019, Soch Psychological Services in Islamabad took down their social media posts advertising affordable mental health services to LGBTQIA+ people, following an avalanche of complaints and threats. The ad campaign, however limited, was effective in attracting the attention of clients from various marginalized gender and sexual backgrounds. As a doctor working with Soch's psychiatric team at the time, I oversaw numerous cases beginning with vague presentations of stress, restlessness, heaviness, or indecisiveness, as well as suspicious blank spaces in their files left by undeclared sexual histories. The first clue is often the client's unusual curiosity about the practitioner's own worldview. "Doctor, are you religious?". "What are your thoughts on LGBT people?".



The lack of dependable statistics and research into the healthcare experiences of gender and sexual minorities in Pakistan, means that concerned professionals have had to improvise by developing discrete networks for informational exchange. This usually involves warnings about practitioners proven to be unsafe for gay or trans clients. This is done primarily to avoid referrals, because unethical attitudes towards gender and sexual minorities are almost never penalized by the local regulatory bodies. "Some doctors and therapists have been known to out young clients to their parents," says Sophia-Layla Afsar, an openly-trans mental health

professional, referring to clients with gender-based or sexuality-based struggles. "Violence (against the client by family members) is often the result in these cases."

Section 377 of Pakistan's Penal Code, a remnant of the British colonial era, makes any sexual act "against the order of nature" a punishable offense. It is interpreted to include homosexuality. LGBTQ-friendly psychiatrists and psychologists are often reluctant to speak openly in favour of gay people, even when speaking strictly from a scientific platform, at the risk of being construed as "promoting criminal activity". Even among the more progressive sections of the Pakistani society, there appears to be a queue for liberation battles. While in recent years, there has been an important push for women's rights via movements like the 'Aurat Azadi March', there's an unspoken consensus that gay and trans rights are a luxury for which Pakistan isn't ready. "Cis therapists routinely tell me how specialist training on gender minorities isn't a priority for them," says Ms Afsar, "even though every practicing therapist has had at least one gender minority client, whether they know it or not."

Among 52 clients that I saw at our medical center in 2020, 19 presented with major depression, bipolar disorder, or generalised anxiety tied directly to their struggles with gender or sexual identity. Their stories from their previous doctors reminded me of the 2018 Stonewall study reporting widespread discrimination against LGBTQ people in healthcare settings, and the finding that more than half of them had experienced depression in the previous year. Substance abuse was also a common presentation among our LGBTQ clients. "I like living in the moment," said a 27-year old gay client with generalised anxiety disorder and an alcohol abuse problem,

“because beyond this moment, there’s nothing. There’s no love or nikkah (marriage) in my future. There are no kids, no spouse, no 3-bedroom bungalow in DHA with a nice lawn, a double-door fridge, and smiling neighbours. My parents won’t be there, I’m sure of that. Drunk or sober, I’ll have no respect either way.”

One in six LGBTQ people reported drinking alcohol almost every day in this study. Although we do not have accurate data on alcohol use among the LGBTQ community in Pakistan, it ought to be noted that religion-inspired prohibition does not appear to be a deterrent in this country (just as prohibition has historically failed in other countries).

However, it’s been heartening to note some positive developments in Pakistan with respect to queer rights over the past decade. In 2018, trans people finally earned the right to self-identify their gender on all official documents; and in 2020 the country extended its government health insurance scheme to trans people, making it significantly easier for trans people to access healthcare services. Meanwhile, some progressive community spaces have also opened their doors to trans people throughout Pakistan. Many of our clients have found a second home at Cafe Sol in Islamabad, which often conducts public talks and workshops on struggles pertaining to

gender, and organizes social activities to help minorities with various mental health conditions reintegrate into society.

Mental health specialists continue to exchange information among themselves to become better equipped at managing clients undergoing gender transition or struggles pertaining to their sexual orientations. Ms Afsar is currently working with the Gender Interactive Alliance, and trains MHPs on dealing with queer clients with due sensitivity. Pakistan, like any developing country, has difficult challenges ahead regarding the welfare of its gender and sexual minorities. However, the resilience of Pakistani LGBTQ community, and the dedication of their scientific allies, continues to offer hope.



Dr Faraz Talat

Future events

Transcultural Special Interest Group Annual Conference 2022, RCPsych. March 7th.

Join us at our 2022 TSIG annual conference which is planned to be a face to face event. Please add this date to your calendar and join us to hear great talks, focused on transcultural psychiatry.

RCPsych International Congress 2022, June 20th- 23th.

The RCPsych International Congress will be the first face to face congress organised by the college, this will take place in Edinburgh in June 2022. Save the date.