Correspondence

NHS morality and care based on compassionate values

It is difficult to disagree with the main thread of Cox & Gray’s argument that the National Health Service (NHS) as a whole has lost its grip on being person-centred in any genuine way, amidst the industrialisation and authoritarian managerialism of the modern NHS. However, I would take issue that the College Centre for Quality Improvement (CCQI) is being idle about the matter.

For over 12 years, I have worked with CCQI staff to set up and develop three projects to promote exactly what Cox and Gray are asking for: robust systems of quality assurance and quality maintenance which focus on the emotional experience of the patients in their particular treatment environments. The Community of Communities quality network for therapeutic communities started in 2002; the Enabling Environments Award (which is suitable for any setting) was established in 2009; and the National Enabling Environments in Prisons project began to improve relational-based practice in participating British prisons in 2009. All three projects continue to flourish, and more are planned.

The Enabling Environments Award is based on a set of ten value statements which define ‘relational excellence’ in work environments. These value statements have been processed to form ten standards, each with several criteria for demonstrating that they have been met. Naturally, compassion and the quality of relationships are at the centre of the expectations. The standards are measured by submission of a portfolio, for which we have designed a flexible and hopefully enjoyable process, rather than a persecutory inspection. Rather than being part of the regulatory burden that many units nowadays feel, our experience to date is that participants take great pride in the process and receiving the resultant award.

It is important to note that the award was prominently mentioned in the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ report Cox & Gray are commenting on, OP92: ‘The Enabling Environments Award recognises that good relationships promote well-being, but that many organisations and groups fail to address this aspect of people’s lives’. It therefore already forms part of the College’s response to the Francis report.

Unfortunately, the response from NHS organisations (mental health and others) has not been encouraging and the award is much better used and recognised in the prison service (mental health and others) has not been encouraging and the College’s response to the Francis report.

In December 2013, the Royal College of Psychiatrists published an occasional paper responding to the Francis report, OP92. In an editorial, John Cox and Alison Gray stridently criticise the document. By contrast, I believe that OP92 strikes exactly the right tone and that the actions it sets out should be strongly supported. All members of the College should read it (it is available at the College website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/files/pdfversion/OP92.pdf). It succinctly relates principles to the actions that the College is taking.

I suspect that the source of dissatisfaction for Cox & Gray lies in the following passages in the document: ‘Responses to inadequate or abusive practice tend to introduce this suggestion through the rhetorical device of an allegation that OP92 fails to address the inadequacies of the “business model” in healthcare. This criticism is in any case
inaccurate; OP92 includes an implicit critique of the entire system and the clinical environments it creates, as can be seen in the passages I have quoted.

It is disappointing that Cox & Gray declare no conflict of interest in their editorial. Four years ago, in a letter to this journal, they supported a call by Robert Higgo and myself for the College to establish a working party on psychiatry and religion. Their declaration of interest in that letter was as follows: ‘John Cox is a Christian from the Methodist Tradition. Alison Gray was recently ordained Deacon in the Church of England’, and their affiliation was stated as ‘Centre for Faith Science and Values in Healthcare, University of Gloucestershire’.

Cox & Gray’s religious faith may well help them to adhere to their own moral standards. They have every right to understand things that go wrong in the world in terms of morality and religious faith. These are personal matters. The suggestion that the Royal College of Psychiatrists should take such a position is wholly inappropriate and wrong. The College has important institutional roles concerning ethics and professional behaviour, which are part of its overall raison d’être: to maintain and improve standards of care for patients. These roles would be utterly compromised by dabbling in morality and religion. If the College were to take a position on individual morality informed by religious thinking, we would enter a morass of schism and conflict. This would do nothing to protect patients.

Three years ago, concern was raised that the ostensibly anodyne College position paper Recommendations for Psychiatrists on Spirituality and Religion would be taken as permission to breach professional boundaries with respect to religion. The vast majority of psychiatrists successfully avoid inappropriate interdigitation of faith, belief and professional practice. It will not be just the atheists who will find Cox & Gray’s editorial worrying.

**Declaration of interest:** I am an atheist.


Rob Poole is Professor of Social Psychiatry, Centre for Mental Health and Society, Bangor University, Bangor, UK, email: rob.poole@wales.nhs.uk
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**Authors’ reply:** We welcome the opportunity to reply to Professor Poole’s stimulating and challenging commentary on our editorial which, even if misunderstood, has clearly succeeded in alerting the readership to the pressing managerial and moral challenges for the NHS in the aftermath of the Francis report.

The College, in its 6-month update of its report, has a further chance to unravel the complex contributing circumstances in Mid Staffordshire, and to consider not confining its recommendations to mental health services alone. The failure to put patients first and the neglect of basic quality of care standards could be replicated elsewhere. The task is not confined to applied scientists, but involves values as well as the personal ethics of members. Therefore, in appearing to belittle the contribution of moral philosophers, comparative religion experts and even patient groups to the consideration of the roots of compassion and to the conceptual underpinning of patient-centred care, Prof. Poole is out of kilter with much local and international work in this field.

We would wish also to counter his suspicion that the source of our dissatisfaction with OP92 was linked to a secret Christian plot to impose our religious values on others of a different faith or none. That was far from our intent — as a detailed, unblinkered reading of the editorial would confirm. Moreover, our earlier disclosures of interest were as cited, but have been repeated without first checking neither their current accuracy, nor the precise context in which those declarations were appropriate. For the interest of readers, J.C. remains a lay member of a Methodist Church in Cheltenham, A.G. is now an associate priest in the Church of England, and the Centre for the study of Faith, Science and Values at the University of Gloucestershire closed last year.

Rex Haigh, on the other hand, is correct to have identified our implicit awareness that the values of the therapeutic community, the understandings of the need for healthy environments respectful of the person — and the grasp of group processes — have each conditioned our search for solutions to the current NHS impasse. The excellent work undertaken by the College’s Centre for Quality Improvement (CCQI) was referred to in our editorial and in the College response. It is much to be hoped that the CCQI will increasingly be more integrated with the other College structures, so that its impact on routine medical work in acute hospital care (such as intensive care, a gastrointestinal cancer service or a primary care community unit) can be facilitated. The lack of uptake of the CCQI’s projects in the NHS (other than the Quality Network for Perinatal Mental Health Services, which is conspicuously successful) is, in the context of the Francis recommendations, a cause for much concern and may be symptomatic of the current malaise.

We thank both correspondents for prolonging this timely and important debate. We conclude by declaring an interest in the hope that the College, in tandem with other national organisations, will seek for a majority opinion about the nature of these key structural issues in the NHS — including the fitness for purpose of the competitive business model — and also facilitate a greater understanding of the conceptual (biological, philosophical, ethical, humanistic and religious) underpinning of the nature of health, the process of healing and the primacy of the person.

**Declaration of interest:** A.G. is a Non-Stipendiary Associate Priest in the Church of England.


John Cox, Professor Emeritus, Keele University, UK, email: john1.cox@virgin.net, and Reev Dr Alison Gray, Zgetter NHS Foundation Trust, Hereford, UK.
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False positive phencyclidine result on urine drug testing: a little known cause

Phencyclidine (PCP) is a hallucinogenic drug, often referred to as 'angel dust'. Its short-term effects are seen for approximately 1 h after ingestion and may include hallucinations, disinhibition, euphoria and agitation. Long-term use can lead to symptoms resembling psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia. Its detection time in urine is approximately 8 days.1 We would like to highlight two cases of false positive results for PCP on urine drug screening at a community mental health rehabilitation centre.

Patient A was a 25-year-old male with paranoid schizophrenia, admitted to an acute psychiatric ward under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 because of deterioration in mental state following medication non-adherence and a history of illicit drug use. He was transferred to the rehabilitation centre under Section 3 of the Act 5 months later, exhibiting mainly negative symptoms of schizophrenia. He was receiving treatment with venlafaxine 150 mg twice daily, lithium carbonate 800 mg once daily and clozapine 400 mg in the evening; he also had lactulose 10 ml twice daily. A urine drug screen was performed after staff found cannabis in his room. The result was positive for both PCP and THC (marijuana), although the patient denied taking any PCP. The test was repeated and results were positive for PCP only.

Patient B was a 38-year-old male with paranoid schizophrenia admitted under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act after being arrested for wielding knives in public. He was transferred to the rehabilitation centre under Section 3 of the Act 8 months later with ongoing psychotic symptoms including ‘electric shock sensations’ which he attributed to possible chemical warfare. He was receiving treatment with risperdal consta 50 mg IM twice weekly, venlafaxine 75 mg twice daily, clonazepam 0.5 mg twice daily and procyclidine 5 mg twice daily. A urine drug screen was performed after staff found cannabis in his room. The result was positive for both PCP and THC (marijuana), although the patient denied taking any PCP. The test was repeated and results were positive for PCP only.

Confirmed tests, such as gas chromatography/mass spectrometry can be used to distinguish between the two.

Based on this information, the urine assay results showing PCP for patients A and B were determined to be false positives due to cross-reactivity with venlafaxine. Patient A’s leave was reinstated as it had been cancelled until drug testing was negative. For patient B, we were able to exclude illicit drug use as a cause for his altered mental state. Increased awareness of the cross-reactivity between PCP and venlafaxine is important for all healthcare professionals to avoid inappropriate suspicion of illicit drug use.


Gabriella L. Landy is a core trainee (CT3) psychiatry, email: gabriella.landiy@candi.nhs.uk, and Mukesh Kripalani is a consultant psychiatrist, both at Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK.

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No beds for young people – also in Scotland

I read Myers et al’s correspondence1 with great interest. I am a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist working in the forensic child and adolescent mental health services and I am simply dumbfounded by the difficulties that frequently present when trying to coordinate in-patient admissions for young people in Scotland for those who have mental health problems and concurrent risk to others.

Like the authors of the letter, I see the deterioration and the stigma that young people face when admissions are being coordinated. At present, there are no secure mental health beds in Scotland who accept under-18-year-olds. Our only option is to beg for intensive psychiatric care unit beds from colleagues in adult services. I also echo concerns that there is no joined-up bed management system within the service I work for, which means that should I wish to admit a young person, it is up to me to call each unit individually.

Often my only option is to send young people to England, where there are private-sector adolescent medium secure beds. This comes with significant cost, both financial and emotional. I have seen how hard it is for families to agree to send their loved ones so far away, knowing they will struggle to visit or sometimes even telephone. In addition, if a young person is on remand or pre-trial, they cannot be sent across the border.

I thank the authors for making me realise that I am not isolated in this demoralising and stigmatising situation. But this is a bittersweet pill as it only serves to highlight that services need to be made more available for young people across the country.


COLUMNS

Correspondence
It is more than just beds

We read with interest the correspondence by Myers et al. It is more than just beds.


Laxmi Kathuria is a consultant psychiatrist working at Yorkhill Hospital, Glasgow, UK, email: laxmi.kathuria@nnhs.net.

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Self-diagnosing bipolar disorder: questions for clinicians

It is not uncommon in psychiatry to receive referrals for patients who believe they have bipolar affective disorder. This has been explained partly by a trend of celebrities openly talking about having bipolar disorder along with an explosion of information about bipolar illness on the internet.

We analysed the records of 46 patients who over a 3-year period requested referral to a community mental health team seeking a diagnosis of bipolar illness. The patients were predominantly young women (mean age 32 years, female:male ratio 31:15). Clinically, they presented with problems of anxiety and low mood with a history of mood swings (90%), racing thoughts (70%), impulsivity (100%) and overactivity (60%). All patients had visited a website offering self-assessment for bipolar illness and reported scores being highly suggestive of a bipolar illness – this had influenced their decision to seek referral. Around 25% of patients reported seeing a TV programme featuring a celebrity talking about their bipolar illness. Five patients, of their own accord, had joined their local Bipolar UK support group before the assessment.

None of the patients were given the diagnosis of bipolar illness at initial assessment. All were given formulations about their problems in terms of mood swings, coping and lifestyle issues. The ICD-10 diagnostic categories were mixed anxiety depression/adjustment disorder/dysthymia (20 patients); emotionally unstable personality disorder (10); alcoholism/ alcohol misuse (5); no psychiatric diagnosis (11). About a third of patients, after having their history taken, readily agreed at the end of the first meeting that they were not suffering from a bipolar illness. Five patients asked for a second opinion; all were experiencing relationship problems.

Our experience highlights the issues that may be encountered while assessing patients who actively seek diagnosis of a bipolar illness. There is merit in taking the patient into confidence about the confusion surrounding diagnosing bipolar illness and the risks associated with medical treatment. Also, while trying to arrive at a diagnosis, it may be best to look for classical or severe bipolar illness and if the patient is not suffering from a bipolar illness then the diagnosis should be avoided or deferred until conclusive evidence is obtained.


Avneet Sharma is a consultant psychiatrist with South Gloucestershire Recovery Team, Blackberry Hill Hospital, Bristol, UK, email: avneet.sharma@nhs.net, and Jitender Kumar is a specialty trainee (ST5) in forensic psychiatry at Fulbourne Hospital, Cambridge.

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