

# MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

*Welcome to the Conference Supplement of Psychiatria Danubina for the Twined Conference on Mental Health in Mons, Belgium, 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> September 2020:*

## ***The new challenges in psychiatry***

When we began working on this conference by October 2019, the world was as normal as it could be, that is of course, if we see climate change, wars and terrorist incidences as normal.

We began working towards an inclusive conference where the researchers (senior and junior) clinicians and medical students would come together and present their research, share their experiences and knowledge, but most importantly enjoy the charm of Belgian town of Mons and of course learn from each other.

Then came along, totally out of blue, Covid-19 virus which began in China, but soon spread far wide all over the world turning into a pandemic, causing devastating effects on number of European countries such as Italy, Spain, France and UK. With Belgium being no exception, the months from March to May 2020 were particularly dark, with widespread unimaginable fear and lockdowns that were never seen before with possible exception being the times of the Spanish Flu, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars.

However, despite lockdowns, for many, work continued in the virtual world, utilising modern means of communications. Indeed we the organisers, continued with our preparations and very much hoped that by September 2020, we would have contained the virus and the conference would take place in the real world. Unfortunately and to our great disappointment, after period of containment, there have been rising cases (through hotspots) of Covid-19 in a number of European countries including Belgium. So we may not have beaten the virus as yet, but we are not beaten either. We have therefore, decided to hold the conference, with virtual presentations from those not living in Belgium, thus allowing presentations from countries which have travel restrictions.

Preparation of the conference Supplement of Psychiatria Danubina is an important part of the conference which helps to disseminate research and academic knowledge from those taking part in the conference. As has been the case with supplements from our past sister conferences (Cambridge Biennial International Conference on Mental Health, Cambridge, UK and mental health conference organised by Centro Studi Psichiatrici - Psychiatric Studies Centre) supplements, we have tried to make this conference supplement scientific and yet as eclectic as possible.

The papers in this conference Supplement of Psychiatria Danubina include, contributions from not only senior researchers, young rising researchers, but also clinicians as well as medical students who are having their first stab at research and publishing. We also believe contribution from young researchers and medical student is important in keeping the future of research and continued building of knowledge with regards to mental health alive, thus benefiting mentally ill and the humanity. This makes this scientific journal truly inclusive and unique.

This Supplement includes papers covering wide variety research from Belgium, Brazil, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Qatar, Russia, Switzerland and UK.

The papers cover number of topics that involve mental health, ranging from the effects of Covid-19 pandemic on mental health, psychosocial issues (such as stigma) in mental health as well as influence of biological factors. Linking psychosocial factors with biological factors (medical disorders) has been addressed in papers exploring the role lifestyle factors, exercise, nutrition and immune system in mental health which is rightly gaining importance.

Particular attention has been paid to the younger generation and the evolution of society. The immense advances offered by the Internet and new technologies have their share of difficulties, such as burn out, new forms of addiction, changes in social interactions that we see every day in our clinical practice.

Science is a powerful force in understanding the way the world works.

The pursuit of truth is at the heart of science, although we know that the scientific truth is neither absolute, nor timeless. Scientific knowledge is the outcome of a plurality of scientific discoveries that, over history, have produced knowledge.

Science is not just a collection of data, it's how we try to interpret, understand and visualize it as a larger picture, only then, we can use to make predictions about the behavior of those same systems in the natural world.

We would like to thank all the authors for their contribution in helping to put together this supplement which would not have been possible without the hard work of Rajko Horvat. Additionally, we would like to thank Miro Jakovljevic, Marija Eljuga and other staff from Medicinska Naklada involved in producing this supplement journal.

We hope you will enjoy reading the wide range of interesting papers.

## **Guest Editor in Chief**

*Dr Juan Martin Tecco, MD, MBA  
Centre Hospitalier Psychiatrique le Chene aux Haies, Mons, Belgium*

## **Guest Editorial team members**

*Dr Rashid Zaman, BSc (Hons) MB BChir (Cantab) DGM MRCP FRCPsych  
CMHR-CU & Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK*

*Prof Nicholas Zdanowicz, MD, PhD  
Universite Catholique de Louvain, Yvoir, Belgium*

*Dr Giuseppe Tavormina, MD  
Centro Studi Psichiatrici - Psychiatric Studies Centre, Iseo, Italy*