

Obituary

Richard P. Michael, MD, PhD, DSc, FRCPsych
Formerly Reader in Behavioural Physiology
and Consultant Psychiatrist at the Bethlem Royal
and Maudsley Hospital (1963–1972),
Professor of Psychiatry and Anatomy,
Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta,
USA



Richard Michael, who died recently at the age of 89, gained a reputation for his meticulous and ground-breaking studies of the neuroendocrine mechanisms underlying sexual behaviour, a subject highly relevant to clinical and social psychiatry. These studies involved the observation of sexual behaviour in female cats and correlating it with stages of the oestrous cycle.

His most productive research was done at an early stage at the Institute of Psychiatry, London. He began his appointment there in 1959, formally as a member of the Department of Psychiatry under Professor Aubrey Lewis but with a close attachment to the Department of Physiology, led by Professor Geoffrey Harris, his principal research mentor. He began with a key observation that the ovariectomised cat never showed receptive sexual behaviour towards the male. This could be re-established with the administration of oestrogens. He was able to demonstrate by carrying out experiments on spayed cats that their mating behaviour could be restored with the systemic administration of oestrogen. The more important aim of this work was to identify the precise location of oestrogen sensitivity in the brain. The hypothesis was that some regions would be highly responsive to tiny concentrated oestrogen implants on the tip of a needle inserted stereotaxically in selected areas. If implanted in a critical area of the brain the oestrogen pellet would restore the stereotyped mating behaviour of the female cat in spite of the animal retaining an anoestrous genital tract. This would demonstrate that the effect of the oestrogen was localised in the brain and was not due to a generalised endocrine effect.

Using meticulous experimental designs, Richard was able to demonstrate that the critical areas lay in the cat's hypothalamus. This formed part of a 'mating system', localised to some degree but stretching from the anterior preoptic region to the post-mammillary bodies. He cautiously concluded in an article in 1962 that this area of the hypothalamus contained oestrogen-sensitive receptors. At this time the notion of an oestrogen receptor in the brain was entirely novel.

Conscious of the importance of species-confined behaviour, Richard then decided to search for equivalent neuroendocrine mechanisms in primates and spent the next 30 years on this endeavour. The rhesus monkeys presented more complex methodological problems. The variability of the monkey's skull made it difficult to perform

stereotaxis accurately. It turned out that the pattern of receptive sexual behaviour of rhesus females was nowhere near as stereotyped as that of female cats. Primates showed large individual differences in behaviour, with marked partner preferences. He concluded, with some reluctance, to leave the development of implant studies in primates to others.

Richard's research then changed direction so that he conducted mainly behavioural studies. These required the construction of special laboratories situated in the grounds of Bethlem Royal Hospital. He obtained the funding and was directly concerned with the design and building work for the project. A later development was the provision of an outside enclosure for anubis baboons, the only outside experimental primate enclosure in London. He trained research workers in the skills of behavioural observation. A great deal of this work was done in collaboration with Professor Doris Zumpe and they co-authored two books.

It was with some regret that in 1972 Richard left Bethlem for a new appointment as Director of Biological Psychiatry Research Laboratories at the Georgia Mental Health Institute, Atlanta. He found this necessary because of the need for increased funding for this type of research, the animals having become very expensive and requiring first-class facilities for their care and observations. In Atlanta he widened his studies into other aspects of sexual behaviour in primates, such as grooming and the role of olfactory communication and social factors in sexual and aggressive behaviour.

It is not clear what led Richard to develop his keen interest in animal behaviour. He was born in London on 9 June 1924 where he was brought up, attending the Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School. He was grateful to his teachers for recognising his potential and turning him from what he described as an idle pupil into a high achiever. At an early stage of his medical career, Richard went to the Maudsley where he combined his psychiatric training with clinical and animal research supported by a series of research fellowships. From 1956–1959 he held an MRC Fellowship in clinical research with attachments to the Departments of Physiology at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine and the Institute of Psychiatry. In 1958 he obtained a Rockefeller travelling fellowship in medicine, which he held at the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Maryland, USA. Unusually for a psychiatrist whose main research focus involved physiological studies, throughout his career he maintained a small psychoanalytic practice.

Richard was a remarkable personality with a mischievous sense of humour. Even after years spent in the USA during his later career, he never lost his clear-cut English accent and precise diction. He was hospitable and an excellent host. One of his quirks was to quiz waiters and waitresses in restaurants about their country of origin. This could be embarrassing for his friends but the recipients seemed to enjoy it. His regret at leaving England was mitigated after his retirement by spending half the year in Atlanta and the remainder in his attractive home and garden in Alfriston, East Sussex.

He had a long and happy marriage to Anne Huntington whom he met when they both worked at the Royal Free

Hospital. Richard died peacefully at home in Atlanta on 5 January 2014. He is survived by Anne, three sons, one daughter and nine grandchildren.

Gerald Russell

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Reviews

Public Mental Health: Global Perspectives

Edited by Lee Knifton & Neil Quinn

Open University Press, 2013, £24.99, pb, 264 pp.

ISBN: 9780335244898

This book aims to give an overview of the key issues in public mental health. It is timely as many populations are suffering the depressing consequences of the economic downturn, interest in mental health and well-being by policy makers is increasing, and the recent World Health Organization's Mental Health Action Plan moves this issue to the top of the health agenda.

The book is structured in four parts examining the promotion of mental health and well-being; the prevention of mental health problems; enhancing the lives of people with mental health problems; and finally, bringing these three lines of action together to explore public mental health at each life stage.

This is an anthology of essays. Each chapter is written by an expert or experts from their individual professional and political stance. Do not expect to be convinced of one specific set of actions which must be taken to improve public mental health; instead, the book encourages reflection on the variety of possible approaches, allowing the reader to consider these viewpoints and make their own informed decision about what they might champion in their own area.

The chapter by Wilkinson & Pickett, singled out as a highlight on the back cover blurb, will not offer much that is new if you have read their book *The Spirit Level* (or a good summary); however, it is good to revisit this in the context of very different perspectives. I most enjoyed the chapters on measuring mental health and on suicide prevention which were thought-provoking and absorbing enough to read on a homebound train after a long day.

My main criticism of this book is that although it claims to contain global perspectives, and there are many internationally renowned writers, it is heavily dominated by the UK setting, with most international references being to other English-speaking countries. For example, of the 17 case studies, 11 were UK based and 2 were from Australia and New Zealand. This did not detract from the book's utility for me, as a UK-based practitioner, but could disappoint others.

The only other warning I would give is that the book does not start from a basic level, for example assuming knowledge of Geoffrey Rose's work. If you are motivated to learn about

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public mental health, get a grounding in public health first, then buy this book.

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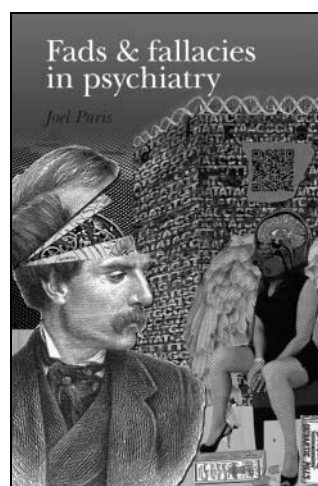
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Fads and Fallacies in Psychiatry

By Joel Paris

RCPsych Publications, 2013, £15.00 (pb), 128 pp.

ISBN: 9781909726062



Joel Paris is a veteran professor of psychiatry in Canada. He examines our periodic enthusiasms for unfounded ideas and the 'cognitive errors of wishful thinking' that underpin them. Perhaps to reassure us that psychiatry is not uniquely gullible, he starts with a short chapter on fads in general medicine. They can be seen to be driven by lack of evidence, therapeutic optimism and the power of the charismatic teacher. He then looks at how these

have influenced psychiatry. Although, to my mind, he is too dismissive of sociology, he is generally an even-handed critic. He scrutinises the foundations of aetiology, genetics, epidemiology and diagnosis, then the areas of intervention, psychopharmacology, psychotherapy, and prevention.

Some of the offences he describes are historical, such as the uncritical adoption of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and psychosurgery. Topical issues include the outside influence of