

I'm writing this column at a multidisciplinary conference in Brazil. It's mid-November, and hot, 30°C every day as summer approaches. The conference hotel looks down over a beautiful beach at Santos near Sao Paulo, but we work from 8.30am to 10.30pm, so in two days I have only looked at it. Ironically, these are the kind of working hours that the conference delegates normally work to improve.

Brazil is new to me – a vast country, with a population of 170 million or so and a land mass bigger than the USA (excluding Alaska), that is hugely rich in natural resources. It is one of the most ethnically diverse peoples in the world, and in spite of extremes of poverty, most people seem to smile beautifully all the time. My *Rough Guide* tells me that football was introduced in the 1890s by Scottish railway engineers (surely a mistake). Pineapples and mangoes are luscious and cheap, and other unusual fruit are plentiful too. Telephone and transport systems are complex and different, especially if your Portuguese is rusty. Almost all motorbikers here wear crash helmets, unlike in similarly hot countries in Europe.

But I am here on serious business – not funded by the BPS, you'll be glad to hear. It's the XVth Symposium on Night and Shiftwork, a series that happens every two years, bringing together a heterogeneous bunch of researchers, who work very hard to learn from each other. Psychologists probably predominate, but there are many physiologists, medical doctors, economists, epidemiologists and mathematicians, and even a lawyer (who I have discovered is also a psychologist), bound together by a common interest in night and shiftwork, which evolved to be my own main research area. A hundred and fifty people from 22 countries are here for a week of 160 keynote addresses, oral presentations, and short poster presentations. So we work hours that are crazy, and heard a samba band that was well above safe decibel limits. Perhaps the samba doesn't sound like work, but it certainly enlivened the opening ceremony, and burnt up a few calories.

What's good about other disciplines? For one thing, we are not the only guardians of good research design and statistics, and we can learn from the approaches of others. As psychologists, we are beautifully placed on the slope between philosophy and physiology to appreciate this even within our own discipline. And it is fascinating how much experimental psychologists have contributed to research and understanding of shift and night

work – and how much scope they leave for challenges from field studies of real shiftworkers. For example, I have just heard a neat paper about sleep-deprived students crashing the driving simulator on their way home from work.

Falling asleep while driving heavy bits of metal at speed is an enormous worldwide problem, but in most cases, if you crash, you hit more severe problems than simply notching up an error on the laboratory simulator. About a third of the audience here put up their hands to admit to falling asleep while driving – luckily, like me, they must have had a soft landing. It's an unsolved real-world problem: drivers are almost certainly aware that they feel sleepy, but something seems to go wrong with their judgement, so that they (and I) think they can beat it. So it ends up as a major public education problem. Several studies have now shown that a night of sleep deprivation affects performance as badly as going over the alcohol limit. How do we get the world to believe this and act on it? That is the kind of issue where the BPS conference and press departments can play a major public service role.

With 16 per cent of the labour force on shiftwork in the UK, the complex biological, social and managerial issues involved are increasingly important. In spite of the enormous progress in knowledge and practice accumulated over 15 previous symposia, there is still a lot to do. I am sad that I have retired, but encourage other younger psychologists to take up the challenge.

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NEWS

News of interest to our readers should be sent to *The Psychologist* on psychologist@bps.org.uk or at the Leicester office. We also welcome lively and informative comment on current events, based on psychological knowledge (up to 1500 words).

BEST PRACTICE AWARD

THE Seymour Berry Centre in Merthyr Tydfil is this year's winner of the Lundbeck Awards for Best Practice in Depression. The judges commented: 'They have demonstrated a powerful and comprehensive example of team professionalism and innovative thinking, taking a proactive role in the development of care pathways and treatment protocols. Their service, which covers 14 practices and a total population of 67,000, has helped to improve care for people with depression, whilst reducing GP workload.'

DUNCAN PHILLIPS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Goal-based learning

IN THE BMA'S GOOD BOOKS

TWO books by psychologists have been praised in the Mental Health Category of the British Medical Association's 2003 book competition. *Think Good Feel Good* by Paul Stallard, a clinical psychologist working with children and families with mental health problems in Bath, and *Substance Misuse in Psychosis: Approaches to Treatment and Service Delivery* edited by Hermine L. Graham, Alex Copello, Max J. Birchwood, and Kim T. Mueser were highly commended at the award ceremony on 5 November in London. Both books are published by Wiley.

THE Football Association has appointed a leading e-learning company to produce eight hours of web-delivered teaching on football psychology, in which learners become the coach of a virtual team. The programme has been designed by a working party of sports psychologists, in which the BPS has been involved, under the direction of the FA's sports psychologist Dr Andy Cale.

The course, also involving the FA Premier League, the Football League, the Professional Footballers Association, the League Managers Association and

the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences, is targeted at the parents, teachers and coaches of boys and girls aged 7–12 years. The emphasis of the course is on increasing the awareness of the needs of such young players. Learners who successfully complete the programme will be awarded the Introductory Certificate in Psychology in Sport (ICPS).

The importance of providing an enjoyable and purposeful introduction to the game is

accepted to be a prime factor in continuity participation and interest in the game. The FA wishes to ensure there is greater understanding of the needs of young players in their introduction to the game.

Andy Cale said: 'The course will focus upon how children learn, what motivates them and de-motivates them so that it will significantly assist parents and coaches in their understanding of children's involvement in football.'

WEBSITES

www.antibullying.net

The Scottish Executive-funded anti-bullying network, including an excellent research based section of FAQs

www.understandingprejudice.org

Site for a McGraw-Hill anthology *Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination*

www.papyrus-uk.org

New leaflets on the prevention of suicide for use by health professionals

If you come across a website that you think would be of interest to our readers, let us know on psychologist@bps.org.uk.

IMPROVING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

THE Higher Education Funding Council for England is backing a two-year project to help psychology departments give a better teaching and learning experience for students with disabilities. The project – Improving Provision for Disabled Psychology Students (IPDPS) – is a collaboration between the Universities of York, Middlesex and Aston.

The IPDPS project will be conducting a number of confidential surveys, focus groups and interviews with disabled psychology students and graduates, and those who teach and support them. As a first step towards designing a detailed staff survey, the project team has set up a brief survey on the IPDPS website (itsnpsy.york.ac.uk/ipdps/). This is intended to give psychology staff the chance to anonymously describe their experiences with disabled psychology students.

□ For more details on the project and how to participate, visit the website or call 01904 433188.

Legislative changes – Not in Queen’s Speech but progressing

In *The Psychologist* (December) we predicted that the Queen’s Speech would announce crucial revision of mental health and mental incapacity legislation. In fact these bills were not included in the Queen’s Speech itself.

However, on the same day the Health Secretary, John Reid, stressed the full commitment of the government to reforming mental health legislation, and announced that a revised bill will be brought forward as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows it. The Health Minister, Rosie Winterton, emphasised the importance of working together with stakeholders to develop the code of practice and consequently to ensure effective implementation of new legislation. Mental Health Alliance chair Paul Farmer said: ‘The decision is an important sign that ministers have listened to the Mental Health Alliance members, service users and carers who have strong concerns about the current

draft Mental Health Bill.’ Peter Kinderman, working on behalf of the Society on this issue, said: ‘We are confident that a bill will be presented to Parliament in the spring of 2004.’

As for the Mental Incapacity Bill, later that week the all-party committee of MPs and Peers set up to examine and report on the bill announced the results of its consultations, giving it a cautious welcome.

The draft bill aims to ensure that, wherever possible, those who lack capacity are helped to make decisions for themselves, and that their right to do so is respected. It also aims to set out clear guidelines for anyone making decisions for people who lack capacity.

The chair of the Joint Committee, Lord Carter, said: ‘This bill is important and long overdue. It’s about respecting the rights of people who lack capacity: some witnesses told us they were fed up with being bossed

about and treated like second-class citizens. It’s also about setting clear rules and guidelines for doctors, lawyers, banks, social workers, carers and families – anyone who may have to help in making decisions for those who cannot make them for themselves.’

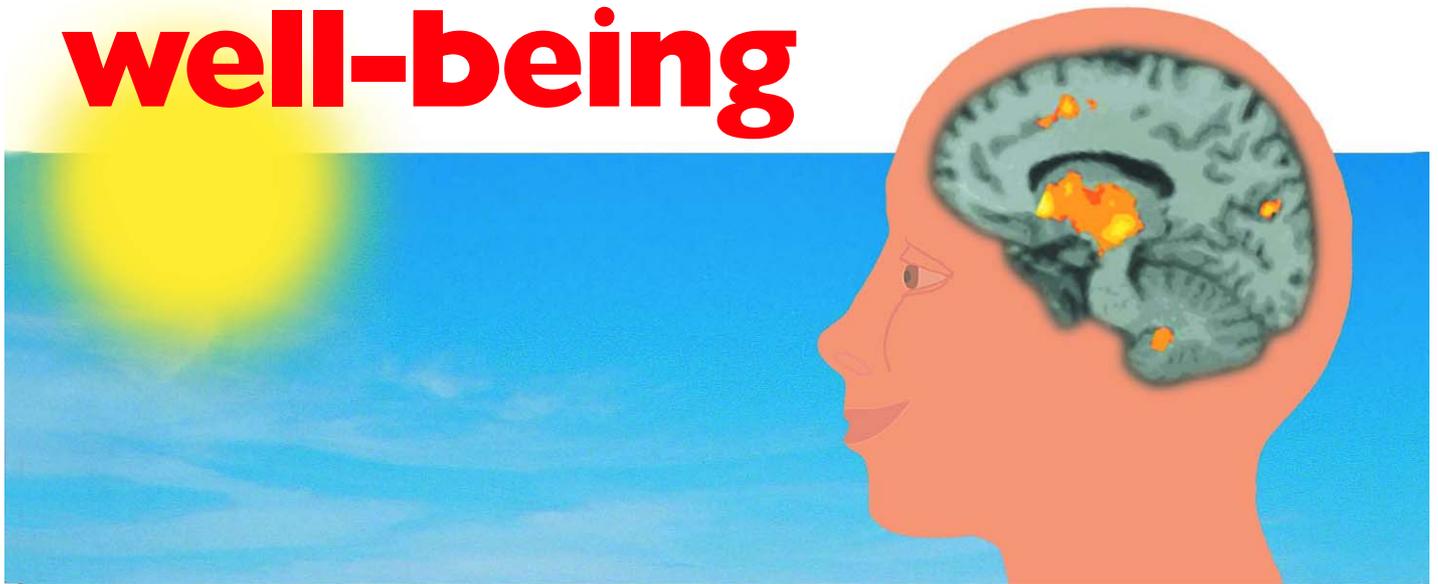
In giving its support to the basic aims of the bill, calling it ‘a big step in the right direction’, the committee said that more work needed to be done to get it right. In particular it felt that some of the concepts and guidelines in the draft bill were not clear enough and that more safeguards were needed.

□ *The Joint Committee’s report can be read in full at www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/jcmib.cfm.*

DEADLINE

We welcome news items for possible publication. Deadline for the March issue: **30 January**

The science of well-being



The Royal Society hosted a two-day event in London in November. The organisers **FELICIA HUPPERT, NICK BAYLIS** and **BARRY KEVERNE** (University of Cambridge) report.

THERE can be few more important topics than how to lead a positive life, so there was a palpable sense of excitement throughout the capacity audience at this two-day meeting. Psychologists, neurobiologists and social scientists were on hand with a host of empirical answers in this fast-emerging field.

After a welcome by Lord May, President of the Royal Society, Dr Huppert broadly defined well-being as any positive and sustainable state which allows individuals, communities and nations to thrive and flourish. This focus on 'life going well' was motivated by the belief that mainstream psychology, medicine and social science have focused almost exclusively on putting right our human illnesses and shortcomings. Hence, this conference aimed to encourage scientists

and practitioners to consider what can be learnt from studying positive human emotions and strengths, and positive health and resilience.

Positive emotions don't merely signal well-being, according to Dr Barbara Fredrickson (University of Michigan). Presenting her 'broaden-and-build' theory, she proposed that positive emotions serve to broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire: joy sparks the urge to play, interest sparks the urge to explore, contentment sparks the urge to savour and integrate, and love sparks a recurring cycle of each of these urges within safe, close relationships. Experimental studies of induced mood confirm that positive emotions lead to broadened attention and more creative decision making, even to more talk of 'we' than 'me'. This contrasts with the narrowed mindsets typified by negative emotions. But Fredrickson warned that we still need 'appropriate negativity', or we are left with 'Polyanna with a plastic smile, out of touch with reality'.

Always on hand with an amusing anecdote, positive psychology figurehead Professor Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania) recounted how people tended to move away from him when he told them he was a psychologist – quite rationally, as psychology was about finding

out what was wrong with people. He proposed that positive psychology represents a sea change in the social sciences, from an exclusive concern with healing damage and repairing weakness towards understanding and building virtues and strengths. The distinction between pleasure and gratification is central to his thesis on the nature of authentic happiness. True gratification or life satisfaction comes not from wealth or the pursuit of short-term pleasure, but from identifying and fostering one's strengths and talents. This leads to engagement, absorption and flow, to the benefit of both the individual and the community.

This sense of purpose was also evident in the talk by Dr Carol Ryff (University of Wisconsin-Madison). She distinguished eudaimonic well-being (engagement in purposeful pursuits and realisation of one's talents) and hedonic well-being (having positive emotions such as happiness and contentment). Empirical findings link eudaimonic, but not hedonic, well-being with positive health, and an astounding range of biomarkers from multiple physiological systems (neuroendocrine, immune, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal).

Questions were already being raised about cultural specificity, and Professor Robert Sternberg (Yale University, and APA President 2003) echoed these by

Oxford University Press have invited the organisers of the 'Science of Well-being' conference to edit a volume based on the conference presentations, including additional chapters, to be published in hardback and paperback in 2005. A precis of the event will appear at www.royalsoc.ac.uk, and the conference proceedings will appear in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. You can also contact Dr Felicia Huppert on fah2@cam.ac.uk.

talking about the cultural bias of intelligence testing. He pointed out that dynamic tests of ability reduce the reliance on previously acquired skills or knowledge. Our notions of well-being should not fall into the same trap as mainstream concepts of general intelligence, which have a narrow and culturally biased view.

Taking a more indirect approach to the theme, Professor Sir Harry Kroto FRS (University of Sussex) spoke about the importance of disseminating exemplary and exciting science through the internet to counteract the alarming and widespread ignorance of science and technology.

Next, Professor Robert Putnam (Harvard University) spoke on the relationship of well-being and social capital – which is the level of trust and goodwill within and between communities. Essentially, the more you know your neighbours, spend time with friends and participate in community activities, the happier you are, and the healthier the community on a host of measures.

By now we had seen how important well-being is in terms of relationships to a variety of empirical measures. Professor Johan Galtung (Director of TRANSCEND: A Network for Peace and Development, based in Versonnex, France) put it right up there as a necessary condition for the satisfaction of basic needs. Four classes of basic needs were discussed: survival, wellness, freedom and identity.

If well-being is so fundamental, perhaps depression is too, which Randolph Nesse (Michigan University) argued might have its roots in evolutionary history. Depression may have developed as a useful response to situations in which a desired goal was unattainable. In some cases, depression may help a person disengage from what has proved a hopeless effort. In essence, Nesse proposed that negative and positive mood states exist to regulate behavioural investment strategies, so that we spend more time on things that work, and less time on things that don't.

Professor David Barker (Southampton

General Hospital) spoke on the fetal origins of well-being. One of the influences affecting mood is the homeostatic setting of hormonal systems, established during development. Men and women who were small at birth have different settings, which may be reflected in differences in responses to stress, or the feeling of well-being. Such differences are often attributed to particular genes acquired at conception, but there is growing evidence that conditions during early development (epigenetic factors) play a major role.

Moving through the life course, Dr Barbara Maughan (Institute of Psychiatry) spoke on how this perspective has provided rich insights in the study of psychopathology, highlighting how individual characteristics and environmental circumstances combine across development to contribute to risk for poor adult outcomes. To date, much less is known about early origins of psychological



"It's Monday morning, Miss Berstresser. Let the merriment commence."

well-being in adult life. Data from the 1958 British birth cohort study explored the roles of childhood social and material circumstances, family stability and relationships, and early individual characteristics as precursors to subjective well-being at age 33.

Professor Jeanne Altmann (Princeton University) was the only animal behaviourist giving a talk. She spoke on physiological and behavioural perspectives on well-being in wild primates. In multiale-multifemale primate societies such as those of savannah baboons, social

networks as well as social status, group size and environmental conditions predict survival, reproduction, and the integrity of social groups. Likewise, some aspects of behaviour, including social integration and social status, have been found to predict one common physiological measure of stress, glucocorticoid concentrations. Altmann's work is providing new insight into the relationships among physiology, behaviour, survival and reproduction.

The day turned to affective neuroscience with a talk from Dr Richard Davidson (University of Wisconsin-Madison). A resilient affective style is associated with high levels of left prefrontal activation, effective modulation of activation in the amygdala and fast recovery in response to negative and stressful events. In peripheral biology these central patterns are associated with lower levels of basal cortisol and with higher levels of antibody titres to influenza vaccine. He presented evidence that these patterns of central and peripheral biology can be both modified by training and shifted towards a more salubrious direction.

With the last talk of the two days, Dr Sonia Lupien (McGill University) challenged the negative stereotype of ageing that has been accepted by most scientists and the general public. New findings show that well-being and a positive view of ageing are major protective factors against the physiological effects of age on the organism.

The day following the conference, the Novartis Foundation hosted a think-tank for the same speakers, chairs, and a handful of other guests. Under discussion were the problems of defining and measuring well-being, and the challenge of gathering evidence that might one day prompt policy improvements in macro-economics, education and the caring professions. What was most striking was that even among such an eclectic mix of leading scientists, there was sufficient common ground, goodwill and personal enthusiasm for the subject of well-being that the three days were a resounding success.

IT'S ABOUT FACE ON TRANSPLANTS

JESS PRIOR reports from a debate at the Science Museum in London.

ON 19 November the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) released a long-awaited report on facial transplantation, which was widely reported in the media. Fortunately, on the same day the Science Museum hosted an informal debate on the issue of face transplantation. The new Dana Centre, set up to provide an adult venue for discussing controversial and topical issues in contemporary science, was a fitting arena.

The RCS report suggested that transplants were 'unwise' at the current time, and indeed guest speakers largely concurred with this view. Sir Peter Morris (President of the RCS), Dr James Partridge (Chief Executive of Changing Faces), Professor Nichola Rumsey (a psychologist from the University of West of England) and Professor Len Doyle (a medical ethicist from Queen Mary's) all gave short presentations outlining their views, and ultimately all advised against proceeding at the current time. Professor Rumsey was concerned about issues of identity and the 'new' appearance for the recipient, the risk of rejection of the transplant and the high level of personal responsibility required to continue with a drug regime for life. The only invited speaker who disagreed was John Baker, a plastic surgeon from the University of Louisville, who argued the case for proceeding by pointing to the successes that have been achieved with hand transplants.

This was a unique opportunity for experts and lay people to meet; the ensuing contributions from clinicians, academics, surgeons, journalists and the public were a useful first step in entering the 'uncharted waters' of human facial transplants. Unfortunately, the views of people with facial disfigurements were underrepresented.

■ Dr Jess Prior is a senior lecturer in psychology at Kingston University.

DAVE ROBERTS

Talking a common language

JON SUTTON reports from a conference with a difference.

KNOWLEDGE at psychology conferences often seems to bounce about between the four walls with little chance of finding the exit. So at this seminar on children's speech and language difficulties, organised by the BPS and the Nuffield Foundation, it was refreshing to see so few psychologists in the audience and to hear questions begin with 'I actually wrote the guidelines you're talking about, and...'

An important topic it was too. As Professor Sir Michael Rutter said in his introduction, at least half of children with severe developmental disorders of receptive language still show major functional impairments in adulthood. Professor Margaret Snowling (University of York) added that oral language skills are the foundation for literacy, numeracy and curriculum access. She presented research showing that phoneme awareness training throughout the first two years of formal education could be beneficial for children at risk of reading problems. Professor Gina Conti-Ramsden (University of Manchester) agreed that language difficulties are likely to affect learning in a number of curricular areas, and that training, support and curriculum design need to bear this in mind.

After this start to the afternoon it came as a surprise to hear from Professor Geoff Lindsay (University of Warwick) that we are far from agreeing on who to help. When children's futures are hanging in the balance it seems like a step back to be

talking in terms of variations in diagnostic criteria and terminology both within and between professional groups. Add this to the debate about who should be providing help – speech and language therapists directly, or indirectly through 'empowering' parents – and it was becoming clear why events like this are vital.

After coffee Dr Morag Stuart (Institute of Education) switched the focus to the training of teachers, finding that nursery staff have very little understanding of language development and therefore lack confidence in implementing language acceleration activities. Stuart demonstrated the need for changes in training through a study finding that 'talking time' (as opposed to 'story time') led to gains in verbal and non-verbal measures.

Casting the net even wider in the final talk, Professor Ann Kaiser (Vanderbilt University, Tennessee) looked at the link between language delays and behaviour problems. Children with early co-occurring language and behaviour problems showed the least growth in language skills over the preschool years. Kaiser recommended starting to address such problems as early as two years of age.

In the discussion and Professor Kathy Sylva's summing up, it was clear that there is no magic wand that psychologists can wave to help children with speech and language difficulties. Parents and teachers have to be involved all along the way – and events for external audiences like this are surely a good first step.

