British Journal of Psychiatry (1991), **159** (suppl. 14), 5

Foreword

Three distinct trends in modern psychiatry distract from a proper concern with the phenomena of mental disorders. Pressures of time and heavy case loads may stand in the way of detailed exploration of mental states. A quick scan for a few critical markers – mood disturbance, thought disorder, delusions, hallucinations, cognitive dysfunction – often seems to suffice for currently accepted diagnostic classifications and treatment decisions. And thirdly, clinical science in psychiatry is dominated by neurological, epidemiological, and psychosocial themes which commonly disregard the intricate realities of abnormal psychic phenomena.

Yet phenomenology offers the most immediately available data on our subject. These data are complex and intriguing, and it is surely of no small importance for the advancement of psychiatry that they should be elicited and ordered with the utmost care and respect. We all hope to see, in the fullness of time, a natural classification of mental diseases, based on associations between clinical manifestations and biological mechanisms and markers, recognising affinities and discontinuities, and untrammelled by arbitrary taxonomic conventions. For this consummation, closer consideration of variables in psychopathology and pathogenesis is more than likely to prove an essential prerequisite.

This supplement, distilled from the fourth Leeds Psychopathology Symposium, addresses some crucial issues in the broad field of delusions and other distortions in the awareness of reality. The reader will be reminded that descriptive psychopathology is very far from being a settled and finished product. On the contrary, it is a rigorous and growing discipline in which there is scope for empirical inquiry, hypothesis testing, improvement in internal consistencies and the development and use of neurobiological correlations. Professor Sims and his colleagues have provided us with a searching and diversified account of work in progress which contains much to inform, stimulate and provoke the clinician: the person who alone is in a position to elicit the basic data of psychiatry.

It is a pleasure to commend this supplement to every psychiatrist, experienced or neophyte, who is aware of the need to advance his/her understanding of the psychopathology of delusional phenomena. It reminds us that classifications, theories, meanings and postulated mechanisms in mental disorder will be as nothing if they fail to heed, and seek consistency with, the fundamental data which comprise the heart of the matter.

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https://doi.org/10.1192/S0007125000296402 Published online by Cambridge University Press