



Transforming health with evidence and empathy: A report from the fourth annual scientific conference of the EAPM 2016 in Luleå, Sweden

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With the European Association of Psychosomatic Medicine (EAPM) now in its fourth year after the amalgamation of two major European psychosomatic societies, the conference traveled far north to Luleå, right beneath the Arctic Circle in Sweden.

Over 400 delegates from 40 countries in Scandinavia, Europe and across the world made their way to Luleå to share their clinical and research expertise with us. We were humbled by the extraordinary efforts some delegates took to reach us. What would usually have been an easy to reach destination with about twenty flights on weekdays from Stockholm turned out to be a real challenge. Air traffic had been hit by industrial action of Swedish pilots. The walk-out just resolved 36 h before the conference commenced. While we were determined to keep calm and carry on, people, in true fighting spirit, made it to Luleå irrespective of all obstacles.

We had chosen the conference theme "*Transforming Health with Evidence and Empathy*" to reflect the enormous challenges today's practitioners of psychosomatic medicine encounter. What Sir William Osler knew already 200 years ago still holds today: "It is much more important to know what sort of patient has a disease than what sort of disease a patient has." Modern science adds a biological dimension to this fundamental insight and the keynotes followed this line of thinking. In the first plenary, we explored the link between evidence and empathy with Gary Rodin (Toronto), Carmine Pariante (London) and Manfred Beutel (Mainz). The second plenary tackled insomnia and obesity with Colin Shapiro (Toronto) and Gladys Witt-Strain (New York). The third plenary, Neuroscience between Body and Mind" was brought to us by Tjörborn Elvsåshagen (Oslo), Rikard Wicksell (Stockholm) and Robert Maunder (Toronto). In his Frits Huyse award lecture, James Strain (New York), argued that depression was a systematic disease and not simply a mental health problem. Then, Michael Sharpe (Oxford), winner of this year's Alison Creed award, tied it all together, stressing the need of integrating physical and mental health care.

An absolute highlight was the opening keynote by Sir Simon Wessely, President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. In his uniquely entertaining style, he reminded us that current undergraduate medical training with its focus on clear-cut tangible diseases left new doctors poorly equipped to deal with the plethora of chronic symptoms, syn-

dromes and soft signs, still awaiting neurobiological explanation. That is why the EAPM annual conference is so important. This meeting provides an opportunity to share expertise concerning conditions commonly encountered but rarely taught.

The EAPM 2016 followed the APM example and opened itself to clinicians. Both research and clinical masterclasses and workshops were woven into the main conference to increase cohesion of the program and ensure that researchers and clinicians remained equally engaged throughout the conference. Particularly popular proved our in-house Masterclass Psychopharmacology in collaboration with the Maudsley Hospital in London, the masterclass Functional Disorders from Aarhus University and a workshop on cognitive assessment in young and old delivered by psychologists from Maastricht and Aarhus University. In the spirit of building bridges between clinicians and researchers, Luleå South Rotary Club had generously donated a Young Health Professionals Travel Award for a practitioner from a middle or low income country. Dr. Deirdre Pieterse, a psychiatrist from Cape Town, South Africa, proved a worthy winner and we wish her luck with her continued training in liaison psychiatry.

The conference was rounded off by a powerful concert with Sami singer, Sofia Jannok and Norrbotten Big Band, followed by a midsummer themed dinner, complete with typical Swedish midsummer weather of rain and grey skies.

We were delighted to welcome to this year's EAPM some of world's most eminent experts of psychosomatic medicine and liaison psychiatry. The conference theme "*Transforming Health with Evidence and Empathy*" has provoked many thoughts, some of which we have encapsulated in our [EAPM 2016 conference video](#). And if the EAPM 2016 has demonstrated that evidence and empathy do not exclude but complement each other, we feel accomplished in our mission. Still, there is a lot to be done. Let's continue the dialogue at the [EAPM 2017 in Barcelona](#) next year.

Conflict of interest

Ursula Werneke has received funding for educational activities (Masterclass Psychiatry Programme and EAPM 2016, Luleå, Sweden): Astra Zeneca, Janssen, Lilly, Lundbeck, Otsuka, Novartis, Servier, Shire in 2014, 2015 and/or 2016.

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