

## country research profile

## The British Psychological Society Division of Health Psychology A profile of health psychology in the UK

By Althea Valentine, BPS DHP support officer

*In September 2008 the British Psychological Society (BPS) Division of Health Psychology (DHP) will jointly host a scientific meeting in Health Psychology with the European Health Psychology Society (EHPS) in Bath, England. This will be the second time the BPS DHP will jointly host the conference with the EHPS after the enormous success of the joint conference in St. Andrews, Scotland in 2001. This article provides a brief outline of health psychology in the UK, summarises some of the recent major achievements and issues health psychology has faced, and provides an overview of UK health psychology training.*

The BPS DHP was developed from the BPS Special Group in Health Psychology in 1997. Dr Daryl O'Connor (DHP Deputy Chair), who has been involved with the DHP committee in various capacities for the past eight years, talks passionately about how health psychology has grown over this period. He said: "many members have helped shape health psychology in the UK. It's amazing how the discipline has grown from the small beginnings of a few dedicated individuals. Now there are approximately 1300 Divisional members, including nearly 700 Chartered Health Psychologists, 300 individuals in training and numerous successful accredited training programmes. Over this time, health psychologists in the UK have also made important contributions to the international health psychology research agenda and to UK Government policy initiatives such as the recent White Paper entitled *Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices Easier*".

### What does the Division of Health Psychology do?

The DHP represents the interests of health psychology practitioners and researchers in the UK by promoting the profession of health psychology, developing and supporting the training and education of health psychologists (e.g., continuing professional development), and supporting research (e.g., supporting scientific meetings, securing secondments to the Department of Health) and contributing to official health policy (e.g., responding to health-related consultation documents). The interests of the DHP are served by a committee of elected and co-opted representatives. The committee work hard to ensure

that UK health psychology continues to progress each year. DHP members also receive and contribute to *Health Psychology Update*, the quarterly publication of the Division.

At the DHP AGM in 2007, Dr Martin Hagger (DHP Chair 2007-2008) stated that in the upcoming year the committee would endeavour to: "continue to represent the DHP in key policy areas, lead new initiatives to further career paths, broaden the profile of the DHP, and provide value for money in DHP membership". Martin Hagger organises all of this alongside his daily work as a Reader in Social and Health Psychology at the University of Nottingham and is co-editor of *Psychology and Health*, a member of the advisory board of the *British Journal of Health Psychology*, and UK National Delegate for the EHPS.

When asked about new initiatives to further careers, Martin Hagger talked about the excellent progress DHP-Scotland have made over the past few years to develop career paths for Health Psychologists in Scotland: "Vivienne Swanson and Ronan O'Carroll, have worked with the Scottish Health Boards and National Health Service (NHS) Education for Scotland (NES) to successfully develop a funded pilot project for Health Psychologists in Training to work in a public health setting, to support NHS Scotland to meet health improvement targets. This means that trainees, two of whom began at the start of 2008, will be funded to work towards Chartership whilst being employed in the NHS. It is an excellent step forwards and we wish trainees every success".

The BPS DHP, in addition to supporting the excellent initiatives by DHP-Scotland, have recently agreed to support the establishment of a Northern Ireland branch of the DHP. DHP-NI will represent the interests of health psychologists in Northern Ireland and have been granted start up funds by the DHP UK executive. The inaugural DHP-NI meeting will be held in May 2008 at the BPS Northern Ireland Branch annual conference with themes of Health, Forensic and Educational Psychology, for details see [www.nibps.org.uk](http://www.nibps.org.uk). ▶



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#### Promoting Health Psychology

As part of the strategic aim of the DHP to lead new initiatives to further career paths, the DHP publicity and liaison subcommittee began to develop a series of leaflets to highlight and promote the competencies and skills health psychologists can offer to various populations. Dr Diana Harcourt (Chair of the DHP Publicity and Liaison Subcommittee 2005-2008), mentioned: "these leaflets will help us to promote health psychology to a range of audiences within the UK, including health care professionals and the general public. We particularly hope that they will help employers see what health psychologists can offer them and the feedback we've had so far has been very positive. We're planning to develop the range of leaflets over the next year and they will be made available as downloadable PDF versions on the DHP website" ([www.healthpsychology.org.uk](http://www.healthpsychology.org.uk)).

#### Supporting Members

As well as promoting and developing health psychology in the UK, the DHP also organises events, to support the interests of members of the Division in their activities in health psychology, fulfilling the strategic aim of providing initiatives to support members and provide value for money for membership.

Dr Jo Hart (DHP National Conference Organiser 2006-2008), combines her research and teaching at the University of Manchester with organising the BPS DHP annual conference each year, a major event in the UK health psychology year. The 10th DHP Annual Conference was held in Nottingham in 2007 and was a resounding success with an excellent scientific programme with contributors from the UK and internationally. The Keynote speakers were: Professor Alan Christensen (University of Iowa), Professor Mark Conner (University of Leeds), Professor Susan Michie (University College London), and Professor Jane Ogden (University of Surrey). As in previous years, the conference attracted a high standard of research papers, and delegates included academic and practicing health psychologists, as well as health psychology students. In true Nottingham tradition, jesters, Robin Hood and Maid Marion kept delegates entertained at one of the social events held during the conference, which the delegates rated highly!

Dr Hart is currently organising a joint conference with the DHP and EHPS in Bath from 9-12th

September this year. She commented: "the conference is combining the British and European format, so there are eighteen different tracks running through the conference, covering the whole spectrum of health psychology and I think they will be very interesting. Although we've already had a lot of good submissions and there is still chance to submit poster abstracts to the DHP until the 1st May. The scientific committee and reviewers are really looking forward to receiving these and finding out the latest in health psychology research and practice from across Europe". For submission and conference details see the conference website (<http://bath2008.org.uk>).

#### Secondment to the Department of Health

The Division also continues to provide health psychology input to the Department of Health as part of its strategic aim to represent the DHP and health psychology in key policy areas. This aim seeks to develop opportunities to inform government policy and transfer research into practice. Health Psychologists (Professor Nicky Rumsey and Professor Susan Michie) provide part-time consultancy to the Department of Health's Division of Public Health on the application of health psychology. Prof Rumsey and Prof Michie are past Chairs of the DHP and actively promote health psychology in the UK and Europe. Professor Rumsey was a founder member of EHPS and is Co-Director of the Centre of Appearance and Health Psychology at the University of West of England. She is also a keynote speaker at the BPD DHP/EHPS conference in Bath in 2008. Professor Michie, a past President of the EHPS, works at University College London and is also Director of Health Psychology Research for the Camden and Islington Mental Health NHS Trust and Camden and Islington PCTs and Deputy Director of the Centre for Outcomes Research and Effectiveness. Both Profs Rumsey and Michie are outstanding examples of leading researchers and practitioners in UK health psychology and illustrate that the UK is a leading nation for health psychology practice and research in Europe.

#### Upcoming Changes to Health Psychology in the UK

One of the issues that the Division has been addressing over the past few years is the Statutory Regulation of Psychologists. Currently, ►

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health psychologists that have satisfied the competencies set out by the BPS for the practice of health psychology apply for voluntarily regulation through the BPS as Chartered Psychologists. It is likely that during 2008, UK Psychologists who are providing a service to individuals, groups or organisations will be required to be regulated by law. Psychologists meeting the appropriate standards of proficiency, likely determined by the BPS, will register with the Health Professions Council (HPC) under statutory regulation. The DHP has drafted the Standards of Proficiency for Health Psychologists with the BPS as part of the preparatory work in advance of regulation by the HPC and has commented on all consultation documents relating to statutory regulation.

Throughout the past year, the Division has also made a significant contribution to the New Ways of Working for Applied Psychologists initiative which has considered how applied psychology can develop to take account of the changing NHS workforce context. The group's work concluded in July last year and focused on seven project areas of which Health Psychology was represented in six.

#### Training to be a Health Psychologist in the UK

When the DHP was first established it included a 'grandparenting' route to allow Health Psychologists with appropriate experience and skills to become full members of the Division and Chartered Health Psychologists. This route recently closed and individuals now in training for Chartership as a Health Psychologist will follow the a two stage training model that has been in place for three years now, after completion of an approved undergraduate degree:

- ▶ **Stage 1:** Taught Masters degree programme or BPS examination to establish a substantial knowledge base
- ▶ **Stage 2:** Two years supervised practice, covering core competencies in generic professional skills, research, consultancy and teaching/training, as well as two additional optional competencies. This stage can be completed either through a University programme or via the BPS independent route.

One of the main difficulties postgraduates in health psychology face is funding for training. The Workforce Planning subcommittee of the DHP continues to pursue

the case for Department of Health funding for postgraduate training in health psychology in England and Wales. There are twenty five approved taught masters programmes (Stage 1) throughout the UK. Many students complete this first stage, but much fewer go on to the second stage. There are approximately forty Stage 2 Independent route trainees and nine taught programmes incorporating Stage 2 training. Last year, the Division was proud to see the first graduates achieve Chartership through both the University and the BPS Independent routes.

In conclusion, health psychology in the UK has vastly developed over the past decade. Despite changes within the NHS and applied psychology as a whole, health psychology continues to move forward each year in research, practice, consultancy, and teaching/training. The UK continues to be a centre of excellence for the research and practice of health psychology in Europe and the DHP continues to be proactive in developing this key discipline and representing the interests of health psychologists in the UK. ■

If any of the pieces in this or past issues of the **European Health Psychologist** have inspired you to want to write a reply, please contact the editorial team.