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Strengthen academic psychiatry to address burden of mental ill health

A report by the Academy of Medical Sciences calls for the breakdown of unhelpful boundaries between psychiatry and neuroscience and makes recommendations to strengthen academic psychiatry to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental ill health.

Mental ill health accounts for some 15% of the disease burden in developed countries, yet spending on mental health research makes up just 5% of the total UK health research budget and psychiatry has been identified as a vulnerable clinical discipline.

The report 'Strengthening Academic Psychiatry' identifies the challenges and barriers in recruiting trainee academic psychiatrists and considers how to equip future generations with the knowledge and skills required to meet healthcare needs.

Sir David Carter FRSE FMedSci, Emeritus Professor of Surgery, University of Edinburgh, formerly Chief Medical Officer of Scotland and Chair of the working group that produced the report said, *"Psychiatry has an image problem. It is commonly perceived to be isolated from the rest of medicine, not sufficiently scientific and working with stigmatised patients who present a difficult therapeutic challenge. This may be discouraging students from pursuing a career in psychiatry, which could have negative repercussions for the future of mental health research."*

The report found that medical students are often unaware of the opportunities presented by psychiatry and the clinical neurosciences, as well as their close

connections to a wide range of other disciplines, including neurology, paediatrics, care of the elderly and infectious diseases. It highlights a need to increase research capacity and innovation, build support for multidisciplinary research groups and enhance clinical and research training for trainee psychiatrists. The report recommends that a critical mass of researchers working in psychiatric care will strengthen research into mental ill health and help to optimise care for future patients.

The report also recommends that academic psychiatry should work closely with the NHS to conduct large-scale studies to improve our understanding of mental ill health and its treatment, and with industry to develop novel therapies.

Professor Sir John Tooke PMedSci, President of the Academy of Medical Sciences, said, *“The future of psychiatry depends on clinical researchers from academia, industry and the NHS working together to ensure patient needs are met, developing new and novel therapies and translating existing research into patient benefit. We hope the recommendations from this report will help researchers take the next steps towards reaching these goals.”*

The working group was run by the Academy of Medical Sciences with support from the Wellcome Trust, who seconded a member of staff to the study.

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For further information and copies of the report, please contact:
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Notes for Editors

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industry and the NHS, seize international opportunities and encourage dialogue about the medical sciences. www.acmedsci.ac.uk

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