

BJPsych

Contents

- A21 Editorial Board
A23 Highlights of this issue

Editorial

- 227 **The WHO World Mental Health Report: a call for action**
Pim Cuijpers, Afzal Javed and Kamaldeep Bhui

- 229 **Poem – To Sir William Gull**
Nicola Healey

Analysis

- 230 **The phantasm of zero suicide**
Manne Sjöstrand and Nir Eyal

Papers

- 234 **Occupational class suicide risk: 12-year study of national coronial data**
Alexander C.R. Burnett, Quincy Wong, Stephanie Zeritis, Mark Deady and Michelle Torok
- 241 **Optimising plasma clozapine levels to improve treatment response: an individual patient data meta-analysis and receiver operating characteristic curve analysis**
Korinne Northwood, E. Pearson, U. Arnautovska, S. Kisely, M. Pawar, M. Sharma, K. Vitangcol, E. Wagner, N. Warren and Dan Siskind
- 246 **The effectiveness of a primary care-based collaborative care model to improve quality of life in people with severe mental illness: PARTNERS2 cluster randomised controlled trial**
Richard Byng, Siobhan Creanor, Benjamin Jones, Joanne Hosking, Humera Plappert, Sheriden Bevan, Nicky Britten, Michael Clark, Linda Davies, Julia Frost, Linda Gask, Bliss Gibbons, John Gibson, Pollyanna Hardy, Charley Hobson-Merrett, Peter Huxley, Alison Jeffery, Steven Marwaha, Tim Rawcliffe, Siobhan Reilly, Debra Richards, Ruth Sayers, Lynsey Williams, Vanessa Pinfold and Maximilian Birchwood
- 256 **Poem – Heroin chic is in? Reflective poem by a core trainee working in child and adolescent mental health services**
Clare Georgia Kirk Robinson

- 257 **Effect of 25-hydroxyvitamin D levels on the internalising dimension as a transdiagnostic risk factor: Mendelian randomisation study**

Julian Konzok, Sebastian-Edgar Baumeister, Thomas W. Winkler, Michael F. Leitzmann and Hansjörg Baurecht

Columns

- 264 Book reviews
266 Contents of *BJPsych Advances*
267 Kaleidoscope

Cover picture

Sonja Gerstner, You Came?

1952–1971 • Oil on fiberboard • 30 × 40 cm • Inv.No. D 8073/2 (2007)

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Sonja Gerstner (1952–1971) was 16 years old when she first showed symptoms of a psychiatric disorder. Her parents were celebrities in the GDR (East Germany): her father, Karl-Heinz Gerstner, was a television journalist, her mother, Sybille, was a painter and costume designer, founder of the famous GDR fashion magazine *Sibylle*. She later wrote about her daughter's misfortune under a pseudonym in the book *Flucht in die Wolken (Flight into the Clouds, 1981)*, detailing her daughter's three stays in a closed psychiatric ward (with insulin coma and electroconvulsive therapy), the increasing helplessness and social isolation. The demands of Sonja's parents for different treatments and psychotherapeutic supervision remained unsuccessful. Sonja Gerstner's forced separation from her boyfriend Peter, following medical advice, was a traumatic experience for her. In the psychiatric clinic, she kept a diary, wrote poems, composed songs, and displayed a remarkable artistic talent. In her drawings and paintings, she processed her love for "Peer" and her first sexual experiences, which she was ashamed of, but also her doubts, her fears, and her suicidal thoughts. 'You came?' is the title of a self-portrait with her boyfriend, which she painted after receiving an electroshock treatment in 1970.

In December 1970, Sonja Gerstner was released from the psychiatric ward. She felt lonely, unloved, and worthless, and took her own life on March 8, 1971 (on International Women's Day) at the age of 19. In 2007, her mother entrusted the largest part of her daughter's artistic legacy, 150 works in total, to the Prinzhorn Collection on permanent loan.

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We are always looking for interesting and visually appealing images for the cover of the Journal and would welcome suggestions or pictures, which should be sent to Dr Allan Beveridge, British Journal of Psychiatry, 21 Prescot Street, London, E1 8BB, UK or bjp@rcpsych.ac.uk.

