Report calls for strengthening of academic psychiatry

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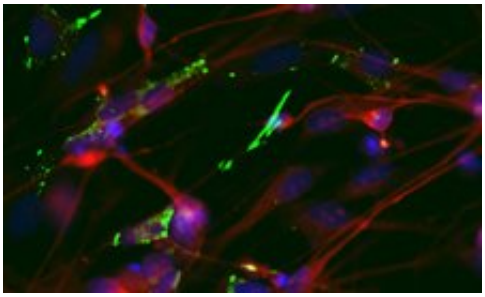

(Medical Xpress)—Professors Shitij Kapur and Sir Simon Wessely, King's College London Institute of Psychiatry, are contributors to a major new report by the Academy of Medical Sciences - Strengthening academic psychiatry in the UK. The report calls for a breakdown of unhelpful boundaries between psychiatry and neuroscience and makes recommendations for strengthening academic psychiatry to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental ill health.

Mental ill health accounts for some 15 per cent of the disease burden in developed countries, yet spending on mental health research makes up just 5 per cent of the total UK health research budget. Psychiatry has been identified as a vulnerable discipline and the report details the challenges and barriers to recruiting trainee academic psychiatrists and considers how to equip future generations with the knowledge and skills

required to meet healthcare needs.

Professor Sir Simon Wessely said, 'It is a very exciting time for clinical neuroscience, which is certain to have a positive impact on our understanding of mental disorders. Like neurology 100 years ago we are at a turning point and psychiatry is a hot speciality for the next generation. We are world class in this country in academic mental health and psychiatry research, but to continue to attract the best and brightest medical graduates we need to focus on enhancing psychiatry's image and enthusing students; build capacity to nurture career development and work to ensure training is flexible and trainees have access to all relevant disciplines.

'We need to work to reverse the perception that psychiatry is isolated from the rest of medicine, and at the same time address common misunderstandings – such as that psychiatry is not sufficiently scientific, that our patients don't get better and our treatments don't work. None of these are true. But what is true is that psychiatry has a bright future, and psychiatrists are happier and more satisfied in their work than colleagues in other areas of medicine. Unless we get the message across what an exciting specialism psychiatry is and make these changes to training and capacity, it will have negative repercussions for the future of mental health research, and in turn impact on the profession, and finally those unlucky enough to suffer from mental disorders.'

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 paediatrics, care of the elderly, endocrinology and immunology. 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 work to optimise care for future patients.

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

More information: Anacker C., et al (2013) Glucocorticoid-related molecular signalling pathways regulating hippocampal neurogenesis. *Neuropsychopharmacology* doi:10.1038/npp.2012.253

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