Skin and Psyche - Closing the Gap

At the crossroads of skin and psyche - linking clinical dermatology and its psychological implications - a new scientific field has been established in the last few years, namely, Psychosomatic Dermatology. Its impact continues to gain importance in many countries and it is being supported by numerous researchers and clinicians, who are enthusiastic about the implementation of integrated treatment methods. The increasing value of this area is also reflected in a growing number of research projects, such as those presented at the conference of the ‘European Society for Dermatology and Psychiatry’ (ESDaP) in Paris, June 1999.

Despite the great interest in psychosomatic dermatology in clinics and practice, and despite the long-known fact that many skin diseases are affected by psychogenic factors, too, up to now, there has been no scientific journal focusing on these two subjects. The new journal Dermatology and Psychosomatics wants to close this gap.

This journal deals with the close interactive relationship of dermatology with numerous other disciplines, such as psychosomatics/psychiatry, clinical psychology, psychobiology and research on public health systems. The contents will also focus on quality of life research, health economy and psychotherapeutice-psychosocial interventions, as well as the methodical side of outcomes research. The aim of Dermatology and Psychosomatics is to integrate these special areas which will lead to further interdisciplinary developments in this new field. Furthermore, this journal wants to contribute to an integrated psychotherapy by representing psychotherapeutic procedures in an interdisciplinary way.

Tradition ...

Although a psychosomatic way of thinking has long been a tradition in dermatology, it has taken quite some time for an international journal to be founded which focuses on these two topics. According to history, Hippocrates (460–370 BC) reported that fear can elicit sweating. And in 1788, Falconer [1] noted that ‘Anxiety reduces sweating and makes the skin pale, which - as we are told - also applies for envy.’ Obermayer [3] collected several other anecdotal reports dating back prior to 1850. In 1850, a translation of the works of Wilson [4] on ‘Diseases of the Skin’ contains a chapter on ‘neuroses of the skin’ in which he attributes ‘itching, alopecia and leukoderma’ to a deficiency of stimulation to the skin. Furthermore, he writes: ‘Eczema undoubtedly functions as a safety mechanism for the health of the organism and the secretion which occurs must be stopped very gradually ...’. It appears appropriate in this sense to consider Erasmus Wilson (1809–1894) as one of the first dermatologists to display an understanding of psychosomatics, especially since his treatise on parasite mania to this day could not be better written [5].

Some years later, Hillier [2] wrote that ‘nervous excitation can lead to urticaria... Fright is known to be a cause of eczema and fear will turn the hair white’.

... and the Future

Since then, national organizations and societies have been founded in most European countries, North America, and in many other countries which support research and the practice of psychosomatic-psychiatric aspects of skin diseases. Dermatology and Psychosomatics has been created to combine and to focus on the activities in these two fields. The editors look forward to a broad spectrum of participation, a stimulating exchange of experiences and ideas, and numerous interesting papers, which will be peer-reviewed by an international Editorial Board to ensure a high scientific standard.

The current issue of Dermatology and Psychosomatics contains the abstracts of the ‘8th International Congress on Dermatology and Psychiatry’ of the ESDaP. Furthermore, the editors provide a short insight into their work with two original articles and a case study which deals with practice-relevant dermatological-psychosomatic aspects. With the publication of this case study the editors would like to start a tradition to create a forum for discussion of individual cases, whereby readers are invited to contribute their own experiences.

The editors hope that this first issue, which integrates articles from dermatological-psychosomatic fields and the abstracts of the ESDaP conference, will offer new and interesting material not only for researchers, but also for the practitioners, and provide a sample of what you can expect in the future.
Dermatology and Psychosomatics will be an active professional journal committed to high scientific standards with the aim of linking these two areas which were otherwise hard to bind. The editors and co-editors would like to invite you, the readers, to contribute articles to this new journal. With your help we will be able to start and sustain a journal beginning in 2000 which creates a lively forum for all those involved in dermatology and psychosomatics. Together, we can launch Dermatology and Psychosomatics for the next millennium!

The Editors-in-Chief

References