A centenarian extraordinaire

Peter Tyrer

Summary

Henry Rollin, a distinguished Member, Fellow and now Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, has attained his 101st year. The achievements of this remarkable man are described and speculations made about the reasons for his longevity and his plans for the future.

Declaration of interest

P.T. is Editor of the British Journal of Psychiatry.

Official predictions suggest that between 10 and 17% of children born today across the world will reach the age of 100. This is a mind-blowing statistic and I will leave it to later editors to puzzle how to celebrate the works of at least 1000 centenarian psychiatrists in our journals in 2111. But – stuck as we are in the era of old-fashioned mortality – we have only one who has reached this landmark, Henry Rollin. (Perhaps there are others and the Royal College of Psychiatrists would like to know of them if they care to get in touch.) But what a centenarian to start off with! I doubt that any in the near future will be able to match Henry’s energy and productivity. This is not to decry the achievements of many others of advanced age, such as Irving Gottesman and Tim Beck in the USA, and Herman van Praag in The Netherlands, but they have some years to go to reach their centuries. One of our Honorary Fellows, Sir George Godber, recently died at the age of 100 and, although he had a highly productive mind, he moved to Cambridge in his latter years to benefit from its excellent medical care for the elderly.

But Henry is not thinking in these terms. He has not stopped since the age of retirement; he has accelerated into overdrive. The notion of slipping gently into old age could never apply to him, and just a brief reminder of Henry’s life in the past 40 years illustrates this. Not for him a fixed routine of existence, supported by a diet rich in the fruits of longevity and a lifestyle free of stress, but instead the rugged highway of someone decades younger. This has included a highly successful marriage (Henry was a late starter here) leading to fatherhood, a 10-year stint as honorary librarian of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, a new career as consultant forensic psychiatrist to the Home Office, attempted murder (of, not by, Henry) and a busy career in medical journalism. The attempted murder was carried out by a patient Henry was assessing instead the rugged highway of someone decades younger. This has included a highly successful marriage (Henry was a late starter here) leading to fatherhood, a 10-year stint as honorary librarian of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, a new career as consultant forensic psychiatrist to the Home Office, attempted murder (of, not by, Henry) and a busy career in medical journalism. The attempted murder was carried out by a patient Henry was assessing at Brixton Prison in London. The assailant had been a professional boxer and my only surprise on reading about this was that Henry did this by tearing down the prison-like walls surrounding so many of the patients’ blocks, so restoring the original park-like grounds.

Henry ends his paper, ‘Sir James Crichton-Browne died in 1938, aged 97, the last of the great Victorians.’ I sometimes think that Henry Rollin is really another great historical figure, but an Edwardian; he has spanned the past 100 years like a giant with one foot in the past and the other in the present, and exhorts Edwardian; he has spanned the past 100 years like a giant with one foot in the past and the other in the present, and exhorts us not to forget what hard-won gains our forefathers have made.

But what of the next 100 years? I do not know what is in Henry’s mind, but I am sure he is actively organising something of importance. I can only stand aside in wonder and surmise:

Now Henry is 100
I have often wondered
What next is in his plan
Our new-born Superman.

Over to you, Henry.
A centenarian *extraordinaire*

Peter Tyrer

*BJP* 2011, 199:360.

Access the most recent version at DOI: 10.1192/bjp.bp.111.102095

References

This article cites 4 articles, 1 of which you can access for free at:

http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/199/5/360#BIBL

Reprints/permissions

To obtain reprints or permission to reproduce material from this paper, please write to permissions@rcpsych.ac.uk

You can respond to this article at

/letters/submit/bjprcpsych;199/5/360

Downloaded from

http://bjp.rcpsych.org/ on October 14, 2017

Published by The Royal College of Psychiatrists

To subscribe to *The British Journal of Psychiatry* go to:

http://bjp.rcpsych.org/site/subscriptions/