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First Floor
10 Queen Street Place
London EC4R 1BE
email: editorial@portlandpress.com
website: <https://portlandpress.com/biochemist>
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Science Editor: Heather Doran (University of Dundee, UK)

Editorial Board: Alan Goddard, Roseanna Hare,
Shane Hegarty, Matthew Lloyd, Maitreyi Shivkumar,
and David Smith.

Senior Production Editor: Kimberly Bayley-Tweed

Production Editor: Nicholas Walker

Editorial team: Orla Lappin

Design by Peter Jones

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Psychedelic therapies

by Colin Bingle, University of Sheffield

It is my great pleasure to introduce the first issue of *The Biochemist* to you for 2024. This represents my first issue as Science Editor, having taken over the role in January that has been performed so admirably by Heather Doran over the past few years. I would like to offer my thanks to Heather for her editorial leadership during this time and I hope that I can continue to build on her excellent work at the magazine. I have had a long association with the Biochemical Society since I joined as a PhD student in the mid-1980s. Most recently, I was Editor-in-Chief of *Biochemical Society Transactions* and Chair of the Societies Awards Committee. Overseeing the scientific content of *The Biochemist* is therefore something of a new departure for me that I hope will enable me to bring the latest areas of topical science to a wider readership as well as to continue to highlight the wider areas of work that the Biochemical Society champions outside of basic molecular biosciences research. The Biochemical Society exists to promote all aspect of molecular biosciences by 'sharing of knowledge and expertise, and supporting molecular bioscientists across all career stages'. I see this as a major role of *The Biochemist* and I hope to work with the editorial board and Portland Press to continue to do this. As Heather stated in her last editorial, *The Biochemist* welcomes your input and contributions and if you feel you would like to submit something to the magazine, then please visit the 'Write for us' pages.

This issue (for which Heather should get the recognition) contains a number of articles on the history of and recent developments in the use of psychedelic drugs for therapeutic applications. Psychedelic drugs are powerful psychoactive substances that alter mood and perception and can therefore greatly influence cognitive processes. Although the use of psychedelics predates written history, and they were used in early cultures in sociocultural and ritual contexts, psychedelic drugs came to the fore after the synthesis of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) in the late 1930s and its adoption as a drug for a range of psychiatric applications in the 1950s. By the 1960s, LSD had transferred into the realm of a recreational drug and was associated with much of the counterculture that was prevalent during the 1960s. As the articles highlight, the widespread adoption of LSD as a recreational drug resulted in it being designated as a Schedule one substance meaning that it was officially banned for both medical and recreational use. Since then, medical applications of LSD and other psychedelics have been greatly restricted and their development as potential therapeutics for human therapeutics has been limited. As the articles in this edition highlight, this is not because of lack of interest in this field of research but rather it is the consequence of political decisions. The articles outline the history of the use of psychedelics in social and ritualistic contexts that far predates the development of LSD. They also highlight what opportunities exist for the development of potential drugs for a range of psychiatric applications and how modern imaging techniques can be applied to more fully understand their mechanism of actions and to aid our understanding. Perhaps,

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as Grace Slick wrote in *White Rabbit*, they may be increasingly used in the future to “feed your head”?

In this issue, we are also publishing a number of additional winners of the Biochemical Society Science Communication prize in the form of the top three entries for the further education video competition as well as for the written contribution award. Read the articles and judge for yourselves. I am really looking forward to being more directly involved in judging the entries for competition later this year. Science communication is increasingly important in everyday life and the Biochemical Society sees these

competitions as a way to both foster interest and reward excellent achievement in this critical area. Get your creative thinking caps on in readiness for this year’s competition. On the policy front, this issue also contains an article outlining the importance of the welcome return of the UK to the Horizon Europe, the EU’s major funding programme for research and innovation.

I hope you read and enjoy this issue and as the newbie editor I hope that you will continue to do so. Please also get in touch if you have any comments or suggestions as to the content of *The Biochemist*. ■