

## Psychiatry in pictures

EDITED BY ALLAN BEVERIDGE

Do you have an image, preferably accompanied by 100 to 200 words of explanatory text, that you think would be suitable for Psychiatry in Pictures? Submissions are very welcome and should be sent direct to Dr Allan Beveridge, Queen Margaret Hospital, Whitefield Road, Dunfermline, Fife KY12 0SU, UK.



*Mahasona* – cemetery devil



*Thovil* – healing ceremony



*Kattadiya* – healer

Images showing masks used in ritual healing (*thovil*) ceremonies. Picture selection and text by Dr Ravimal Galappaththi. Photography by Udeni Herath, Sisira Jayasekara and Sajith Wijenayake.

As far back as 300 BC native healers in Sri Lanka have been involved in the treatment of physical and mental illness. The above images show wooden masks used by traditional healers (*kattadiya*) in Sri Lanka to alleviate certain forms of mental distress believed to be caused by demonic spirits, especially in rural indigenous communities. The carvings symbolise the fears, dilemmas and anxieties of the patient. The healer wears special clothes and a mask (*wesmunu*). He carries a torch (*pandam*) and engages in a ritualistic dance (*nadagam*) to the hypnotic beat of drums (*yakbera*). This creates an atmosphere which unifies the demonic spirits and the healer. This enables the healer to understand the nature of the illness and, after paying tribute to the demon, he is able to treat the ailment.