

## **Speech by Bro. René Stockman for the occasion of the Dr. Guislain Award 2016**

Our 5th Dr. Guislain Award is for our [Museum Dr. Guislain](#) a special one, because 30 years ago we started with our museum. It is again a year of celebration!

Indeed, last year we commemorated that 200 years ago the first Brothers of Charity broke the chains of the psychiatric patients who were living as prisoners in the Gerard the Devilcastle in Ghent. The award was presented in Ghent in order to make the link with this historical event that changed fundamentally the life-situation of the psychiatric patients in Belgium.

But there is also a link between breaking the chains 200 years ago and starting a museum 30 years ago. Because our museum started just with and around these chains, who are still kept as an important witness of this horrible behavior towards psychiatric patients. And breaking the chains is also the main item of our Dr. Guislain Award. Breaking the real chains of iron who are still used in so many countries worldwide and breaking the more psychological and moral chains who are a new way to marginalize and discriminate people with mental illness.

Therefore, breaking down the taboo and the stigma on mental illness is the objective of both our museum and the Dr. Guislain Award. With our museum in Ghent, we try to bring the reality of mental illness nearer to the public and that through the medium of expositions, remembering the history, conferences and publications, in the hope that a reflection will start about mental illness and a change of mentality will follow. With the Dr. Guislain Award, we will stimulate good practice on the medical, therapeutic, cultural and social level who try to break down in a very unique way the actual chains of stigma and taboo in the psychiatric care. Today we can say: no Dr. Guislain Museum without the Dr. Guislain Award and no Dr. Guislain Award without the Dr. Guislain Museum; they became real twins.

Looking to our museum as curator and very pleased with the 30 years of growing and developing as museum, we think that we have to continue the way that we are going. Our permanent collection gives a clear overview of the long history in the field of psychiatric care and we are not afraid to show the reality, which is not always very nice when we are looking to for example these chains, but at the same time it is also a reality of growing awareness and inventive ways of improving the therapy and the care of the person who is mentally ill. We can never forget the important revolutionary moment when chains were broken through more adapted pharmaceutical support. I am referring here to a plate we have in our exposition: "What Pinel did in 1797, did Largactil in 1950". Of course, through medication, we can put patients in new chains, and therefore it will be a constant concern to combine medication with other therapies in the hope that full recovering can be the option. With our museum, we try to make a link with the society, with the actual time, with other themes, with culture and even with the world of art, in order to bring the topic of mental health and mental illness in different ways to the public. In this way, we can reach every year 80.000 visitors and through the media even more people.

And the Dr. Guislain Award? For the 5<sup>th</sup> time we can give the award to someone who is doing innovative work in the field of mental health care. I like to inform you that last year, I visited one of our former winners: Matrika Devkota in Nepal, and I can say I was most impressed by the way that man is bringing a real change, not only in the life of concrete men and women with mental disorders, but also in the broader society. It became for me a real revelation that one man can change the reality and change a mentality. And it became also clear what impact the Dr. Guislain Award had in his life, in his work and in the advocacy that he tries to develop in his country. After our award, he received of the local government for the work he is doing in the field of advocacy the price of the human rights. In order to give

him a further support, we decided on his request to link him with our international NGO [Fracarita International](#). It is all the result of the Dr. Guislain Award.

Therefore, we thank Janssen Research & Development for their collaboration and great support, not only for the Dr. Guislain Award, but also in the further development of our museum. I can inform formally that from now on Janssen Research & Development will be one of the board members of the museum and take up their role as advisor in the further development of our museum. We can see it also as an indirect result of our common Dr. Guislain Award.

Today, on World Mental Health Day, we are very pleased that we can participate in this event and give again a stimulation to continue the work that started more than 200 years ago on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1815: when Brothers of Charity took off the chains of the psychiatric patients and started with a human care that is going on until today in so many places. Today, we are not alone anymore, but many are joining us in this noble work: to restore and improve the human dignity of those who are on so many places not more seen as full human beings. May I invite you to look in the eyes of the one you are liberating of his or her chains, iron chains, psychological chains, existential chains, through your work in the mental health care, in direct care or in supporting the care, through scientific work and research, and feel in your heart the feeling what this person is feeling: the joy of the resurrection!

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