

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS AND PSYCHIATRY AMONGST MEDICAL STUDENTS AND DOCTORS IN THE UK

Rashid Zaman^{1,2}, Fredrick R. Carrick^{2,4} & Ahmed Hankir^{2,3,4}

¹Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

²Bedfordshire Centre for Mental Health Research in association with the University of Cambridge (BCMHR-CU), Cambridge, UK

³Leeds York Partnership Foundation Trust, Leeds, UK

⁴Department of Psychiatry, Carrick Institute for Graduate Studies, Cape Canaveral, FL, USA

SUMMARY

In this paper we identify some of the critical factors that contribute to the ongoing shortage of psychiatrists in the UK. We discuss initiatives that have been launched to try and encourage more medical students and trainee doctors to choose psychiatry as a career. We describe the innovative anti-stigma Wounded Healer programme that was pioneered in the UK with the aim of improving the image of psychiatry and psychiatrists and that was subsequently scaled up and rolled out to over 65,000 medical students and doctors in 14 countries in five continents worldwide. We conclude, with some suggestions that we believe will help recruitment efforts into psychiatry.

Key words: psychiatry – recruitment – stigma – medical students – trainee doctors

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is a chronic shortage of psychiatrists on a global scale (Hankir et al. 2015). In the UK, only 78% of core training year one posts in psychiatry were filled in 2012 and psychiatry continues to be quoted as a 'recruiting, not a selecting, specialty' (Henfrey 2015). The psychiatric workforce in the UK is heavily reliant on International Medical Graduates (IMGs), and only 6% of people who took the Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (MRCPsych) exams were UK graduates.

Mental health problems are on the rise. Indeed, the Global Burden of Disease Study indicates that by 2020 mental health conditions are projected to become a leading cause of morbidity worldwide accounting for 15% of all cases of diseases (Vigo et al. 2016). Therefore, there is a strong argument for an urgent need to increase recruitment and retention of doctors into psychiatry.

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE 'RECRUITMENT CRISIS' IN PSYCHIATRY?

Despite the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) maintaining an active recruitment programme for several years, psychiatry remains unpopular among medical students; indeed only 4-5% of medical students in the UK reported an interest in psychiatry (Halder et al. 2013). Multiple factors have been postulated to explain why this might be the case.

Portrayals of psychiatry in literature, media and film are powerful influences in shaping our individual and

collective perceptions and can play a significant role in the career decisions that medical students and graduates make. The results of a survey conducted by researchers at St. George's University of London showed that 47% of the public would feel 'uncomfortable sitting next to a psychiatrist at a party.' Furthermore, 60% of the public believed that 'psychiatrists know what you are thinking' and over half of the public did not realize a psychiatrist had a medical degree (<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases2013/psychiatristsrole.aspx>). Potential recruits to psychiatry are not unaided when making their career decisions and are influenced by their friends, families and social norms. All of this suggests an unfriendly cultural atmosphere in relation to choosing psychiatry as a career (Henfrey 2015), highlighted by evidence from Canada suggesting that negative comments from 'friends and family about choosing psychiatry were a deterrent' when surveying a cohort of psychiatry trainees (Weisenfeld et al. 2014).

However, what about the negative comments made by medical students and doctors about psychiatry, might that have any impact on recruitment into the specialty? According to the former President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists Professor Sir Simon Wessely, it does. In an article that Professor Wessely co-authored with Professor Maureen Baker, former chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners, they report that the systematic denigration of psychiatry and general practice leads to medical students rejecting these specialties. So, the banter, Wessely and Baker argue is not so friendly after all but instead is exacerbating the shortage of GPs and psychiatrists in the NHS (Baker et al. 2016).

Wessely and Baker cite a fascinating study by Ajaz and colleagues entitled, 'BASH: badmouthing, attitudes and stigmatization in healthcare as experienced by medical students. The study aimed to investigate medical students' perceptions of the apparent hierarchy between specialties, whether they have witnessed disparaging comments ('badmouthing' or 'bashing') against other specialists and whether this had any effect on career choice. 960 students from 13 medical schools throughout the UK completed an online questionnaire ranking medical specialties according to the level of badmouthing and answered questions on their experience of specialty bashing. Psychiatry and General Practice attracted the most significant number of negative comments, which were made by academic staff, doctors, and students. Twenty-seven percent of students had changed their career choice as a direct result of bashing, and a further 25.5% stated they were more likely to change their specialty choice. The authors conclude that the bashing of psychiatry represents another form of stigmatization that needs to be challenged in medical schools and that it not only has an impact on recruitment into the specialty but also has the broader effect of stigmatizing people with mental health disorders (Ajaz et al. 2016).

Whilst stigma against psychiatry is widespread amongst doctors in other medical and surgical specialties and medical students, we must also recognize the stigma that exists against psychiatry in our own ranks and, to a certain degree, amongst allied mental health professionals (psychologists, psychiatric nurses mental health providers/managers). This "self-stigma" amongst certain psychiatrists may be a result low self-esteem in our profession and possibly as a result of specializing in psychiatry because they could not secure training in their preferred specialty. A widespread but, fortunately, not so common idea that has been perpetuated by some of the members of the allied profession is that psychiatrists are just there to prescribe psychotropic medications to mentally ill individuals, has not helped either.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO RESOLVE THE RECRUITMENT 'CRISIS' IN PSYCHIATRY?

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has beneficial information on its website for medical students who may be considering a career in psychiatry (<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/specialtytraining/careersinpsychiatry/careersinfoforugs.aspx>).

Indeed, students are encouraged to become Student Associates of the college free of charge (<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/training/studentassociates.aspx>).

Additional activities of the College include prizes and bursaries for Student Associates and the allocation of funding to help create and maintain medical school psychiatry societies ('Psych Socs') throughout the UK.

The College recently founded the Promoting Recruitment into Psychiatry (PRIP) committee and launched

their Choose Psychiatry campaign. As part of the latest wave of the Choose Psychiatry campaign, the College invited members to create and share a video on social media about who inspired them to choose psychiatry (hashtag #InspiredtoChoosePsychiatry). An example of a response to the call was a tweet by AH, a Specialty Trainee in psychiatry with Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust:

<https://twitter.com/ahmedhankir/status/1049625369274449920>, part of which stated

"What could be more thrilling, challenging and rewarding than healing wounded minds and hearts?"

Be audacious. Be tenacious. Be the best. Make a difference. Save lives. Choose psychiatry!"

We believe all this will certainly help to address the current worrying situation concerning recruitment into psychiatry. However, from the primary author's (RZ) experience (as a consultant psychiatrist and teacher for Cambridge University medical students for over 10 years) of having been directly involved in the successful recruitment into psychiatry of a significant number of medical students and junior doctors (including AH), it is felt that work at grassroots level needs to be not only supported but also given prominence.

Our collective experiences suggest that encouragement of students at the start of medical school, with continuous support and encouragement throughout their training, well in to the foundation years helps greatly. Indeed, a recent British study revealed that hospitals providing the most formal psychiatry teaching have the highest proportions of foundation doctors who specialise in psychiatry (Collier et al. 2013). Furthermore, teaching and training of non-psychiatric doctors (to dispel negative ideas and myths), provision of excellent psychiatry attachments led by enthusiastic psychiatrists (Hankir et al 2015), as well as involving students in research and audit projects which could lead to publications (Linton et al 2017) along with having inspirational psychiatrists as role models, will also go a long way to address the dire future our profession faces.

Below are a few selected quotes from past senior Cambridge University medical students in their clinical years who were considering psychiatry as a career.

"Almost all psychiatrists I have met have been positive role models. I found that most were interested in their patients as individuals, an attitude I did not find in many of my other hospital attachments. Many opportunities have been granted to me by psychiatrists such as Dr. Mark Agius, Dr. Rashid Zaman, Prof. Christos Pantelis, who were enthusiastic in helping me get into audits/research and which resulted in outputs such as oral presentations in international conferences and publications journals listed on PubMed. This has allowed me to explore my psychiatry interest and develop skills that will be useful to any career I end up doing."

Sophie Butler

"If I say that I am thinking about being a psychiatrist the usual reaction is 'why would you want to do that?' Generally, it seems that there is a perception among non-psych doctors that psychiatry is rather depressing and a bit 'woolly' - not 'real medicine.' While I have tried not to be influenced by this negative attitude towards psychiatry, I can imagine that it might serve to put some other students off."

Clare Holt

"I think my 6-week placement with psychiatry has dispelled many of the negative notions associated with the specialty. I realized that we do not only work with 'crazy people,' but rather we care for the general mental health of the population - something which has often been neglected."

Kenrick K.H. Ng

THE WOUNDED HEALER: A 'DOUBLE-PRONGED' APPROACH TO REDUCING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA AND INCREASING RECRUITMENT INTO PSYCHIATRY?

The Canadian Psychiatric Association reported that conventional education alone would not reduce stigmatizing attitudes [towards mental illness and psychiatry] in medical students (Stuart et al. 2014). Under the primary author's (RZ) direct supervision, AH pioneered the Wounded Healer, which is an innovative method of pedagogy that blends the performing arts with psychiatry. The main aims of the Wounded Healer are to engage, enthuse, enthral and to educate to challenge mental health-related stigma, debunk myths about mental illness and encourage care seeking (Hankir et al. 2014). The Wounded Healer harnesses the power of story telling and traces AH's recovery journey from when he was a homeless and impoverished 'service user' to receiving the 2013 Royal College of Psychiatrists Foundation Doctor of the Year Award, which marks the highest level of achievement in psychiatry in the UK (Hankir et al. 2013). Hitherto, the Wounded Healer has been delivered to over 65,000 people in 14 countries in five continents worldwide. The Wounded Healer has also been integrated into the medical school curriculum of four UK universities, and it has featured in the 2014 and 2017 Royal College of Psychiatrists National Medical Student Conference in Liverpool and Leeds respectively (and will also feature in the 2019 RCPsych Medical Student Conference in Cardiff). Audiences report that the Wounded Healer is 'inspirational' and 'the best lecture they have ever attended.' The written feedback below from a delegate who attended the 2014 RCPsych National Medical Student Conference in Liverpool illustrates that the Wounded Healer positively influences students' perceptions of psychiatry:

'Unbelievable. This guy had charisma in spades. It was so reassuring to know that a doctor with mental health issues can overcome them and be so successful.'

'Quite possibly the poster boy for my future career choice.'

THE FUTURE EXCELLENCE INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL SUMMER SCHOOL

The Future Excellence International Medical Summer School (FEIMSS) is a 5-day event for medical students held yearly in Manchester, UK. FEIMSS is the largest event of its kind in the world; the 2013 cohort was comprised of 244 students from 40 countries representing 80 universities. FEIMSS included two lectures delivered by Consultant and Early-Career Psychiatrists. The lectures incorporated references to the humanities (literature, poetry, history, film, drama, and art).

A mixed-methods study on the psychiatry lectures delivered in FEIMSS revealed that 23/25 of the respondents (92%) agreed or strongly agreed that 'The psychiatry talks were interesting' and that 'Attending FEIMSS improved my understanding and respect for other cultures.'

Free text comments across the different cultures were also exceptionally positive:

"I totally enjoyed the lectures they were super inspiring, good job!"

Medical Student, Kosovo

"The talk was very helpful for me to understand psychiatry and psychiatric conditions."

Medical Student, Japan

"Great psychiatry lectures, inspiring and would have liked to hear more from both speakers."

Medical Student, England

"Both were very inspiring and charismatic guys! Overall excellent and made me more inclined towards psychiatry than I was before and proved to me that psychiatrists are not the boring stereotype!"

Medical student, Czech Republic

We concluded that notwithstanding the limitations of our evaluation, which to our knowledge was the first of its kind on such an ethnically eclectic sample, our results suggested that two brief lectures incorporating the humanities delivered by a Consultant and an Early Career Psychiatrist may have positively influenced the perceptions of psychiatry and psychiatrists that medical students from diverse cultural backgrounds have. We contend that FEIMSS provides a platform to recruit medical students into psychiatry from all over the world and enables them to develop cultural competency (Hankir et al. 2015).

CONCLUSION

In this short paper, we have identified some of the critical factors that contribute to the ongoing recruitment crisis into psychiatry in the UK. We have discussed and described initiatives launched by organizations such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists to encourage medical students and trainee doctors to choose psychiatry as a career.

Whilst innovative programmes led by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (UK) to address the recruitment crisis into psychiatry are helping, more work needs to be done at the grassroots level.

This work aimed at medical students and non-psychiatric doctors should encompass:

- Education and information about psychiatry targeting medical students and trainee doctors;
- Busting harmful myths about psychiatry as a specialty not just perpetuated by non-psychiatric doctors, medical students, but also by some members of the psychiatric profession.

A comprehensive approach aimed at the public and medical profession (including medical students), highlighting and recognising that psychiatry is an intellectual, emotionally challenging, academic, science-based medical specialty that draws in arts and humanities, when delivered with pride, by enthusiastic, driven, intelligent and compassionate doctors, will undoubtedly go a long way in improving the image of psychiatry.

Finally, successful strategies, for recruitment into psychiatry must recognize that medical students and trainee doctors are not a homogeneous group. Indeed, to sell psychiatry to medical students and trainee doctors, we must first understand what would attract an individual to psychiatry. This can range from emphasis on the scientific basis of psychiatry and the intellectual and emotional rigour that is required to practice it, to the artistic and humanistic dimensions of psychiatry that enable us to develop a positive rapport and therapeutic alliance with patients.

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Rashid Zaman conceived the idea for the paper and conducted a review of the literature on recruitment into psychiatry and wrote the manuscript;

Fredrick R. Carrick carried out the literature search and contributed to the manuscript;

Ahmed Hankir conducted a review of the literature on recruitment into psychiatry and made a substantial contribution to the manuscript.

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Correspondence:

Rashid Zaman, MD, BSc (Hons), MBBChir (Cantab), MRCPGP, FRCPsych
Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge
Cambridge, UK
E-mail: rz218@cam.ac.uk