

tiative: the World Psychiatry Exchange Program<sup>6</sup>. This is an innovative project as there was not previously any worldwide exchange program for psychiatrists. The concept is straightforward: to offer early career psychiatrists worldwide free exchange programs overseas. At an early stage of their career, participants get valuable exposure to different mental health systems, illness manifestations and treatment options, and ways of working in mental health care. Participants are able to observe in clinics and attend educational meetings, teaching sessions or research activities, according to the plan offered by the host institution, and also have the opportunity to socialize with colleagues from another country. Hosts gain insights and perspectives from enthusiastic early career psychiatrists, eager to learn about different cultures and ways of practising psychiatry<sup>7</sup>.

In October 2021, the Section opened the first call for applications. Further to the traveling restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we offered both options of face-to-face and remote exchanges. We started the first edition by announcing placements in different parts of the world, including Belgium, Brazil, Croatia, Iran, New Zealand, Tunisia and the UK. We received 49 applications from early career psychiatrists (age 25-44) based in Africa (N=28, 57%), Asia (N=11, 23%), Europe (N=9, 18%) and America (N=1, 2%), of which 61% were psychiatry trainees and 39% psychiatrists who had become specialists since no more than seven years.

A total of 10 early career psychiatrists completed exchanges in 2022 in Asia (N=4), Europe (N=3), Africa (N=2), and Oceania (N=1). We collected feedback from these participants. A vast majority (90%) “completely agreed” with the statements that the application process was easy, that it was easy to communicate with their host local coordinator, and that they enjoyed the site where

they completed the exchange (if attended in person). Several participants highlighted the “great opportunity to improve knowledge and experience” and being involved in “all clinical activities of the hospital”. Some also highlighted the opportunity to “discuss very interesting and complex cases” and the care of the hosts to translate patient interviews and seminar presentations to English when this was not the country’s language. The academic experience, including networking opportunities, was highlighted for example as providing “magnificent interaction between neurology, cognitive sciences and psychiatry”. Some participants wrote a manuscript during or after the exchange, which got published with them as first authors in scientific peer-reviewed academic journals<sup>8,9</sup>. Remarkably, all participants said that they were happy they had completed the exchange and would recommend it to a friend.

To prepare for the second edition of the World Psychiatry Exchange Program, we made an open call at the end of 2022 for members of the Section and reached out to more departments and countries interested to host placements for this program. We are delighted to have new countries, such as Australia, India and Spain, offering placements to host early career psychiatrists in 2023.

The success of the World Psychiatry Exchange Program documents the value of international exchange programs for early career psychiatrists. The first edition of the program had a very positive outcome, with participants reporting positive experiences and the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills, and collaborative outputs for participants and hosts further to these exchanges. The program promoted the acquisition of transversal competencies and fostered the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation. It was also a way of promoting formal and informal learning,

encouraging networking, and establishing international partnerships<sup>10</sup>.

As we move forward with the second edition, we are excited to expand the program to other countries, offering even more opportunities for early career psychiatrists to gain valuable insights and perspectives. We hope that the World Psychiatry Exchange Program will continue to inspire and support the next generation of psychiatrists to expand their horizons and build meaningful connections across borders.

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## WPA Working Group on Medical Students: new accomplishments and online resources

As the COVID-19 pandemic persists and millions are impacted by war and economic unrest, it is critical that mental health ser-

vices receive support<sup>1-4</sup>. Despite the pressing need, there remains a significant gap in access to services and an ongoing short-

age of mental health workforce, especially in low- and middle-income countries<sup>5</sup>. In the WPA Action Plan 2020-2023, capac-

ity building and promotion of psychiatry among medical students has been an important pillar<sup>6</sup>. To this aim, a WPA Working Group on Medical Students was created and launched in December 2020, with the support and attendance of the WPA President and medical educators from Qatar, the US, Canada, Pakistan, India, Australia, Mexico and the UK.

The remit of this Working Group includes four components: to identify opportunities for promoting psychiatry as a career among medical students; to identify organizations and individuals interested in participating and promoting WPA's Action Plan in nurturing psychiatry among medical students; to liaise with other WPA Working Groups regarding medical students; and to support medical students around the world<sup>7</sup>.

In order to address the growing needs for mental health workforce, educators must approach the stigma about becoming a mental health professional<sup>8</sup>. To this end, the Working Group produced a "Stigma" video featuring medical students from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Nepal, Portugal, Thailand, Turkey and South Africa, discussing the impact of stigma on pursuing a career in psychiatry. A central theme was the need to speak up to address myths about mental health and dismantle implicit or explicit bias against people with a mental health disorder. This video is available in English, French, Spanish and Russian on the WPA website, so that medical educators can share it with their trainees and medical students.

In addition to the video, the Working Group is continuing to develop free, open access online modules for psychiatric educators. E-learning has emerged as an increasingly important tool for medical student education during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it provides a flexible environment where students can learn at their own pace<sup>9,10</sup>. The topics covered by the modules are "Medical students wellbeing and selfcare", "Stigma in psychiatry – barriers and solutions", and "In-

roduction to psychiatry – what and why of psychiatry". These modules were developed by international teams of psychiatry faculty and medical students and are available on the WPA Education Portal<sup>11</sup>.

The Working Group has organized several in-person events to promote psychiatry among medical students, foster discussions about well-being, and offer career mentorship. The Group visited the Siriraj Hospital faculty and medical students during the 2022 World Congress in Bangkok, Thailand, to share online resources and conduct a burn-out exercise among the undergraduate medical students. Members of the Working Group also organized events for medical students at the Thematic and Regional WPA Conferences in Karachi, Pakistan, and Kolkata, India in 2023.

To complement the in-person conferences, the Working Group is fostering global engagement of medical students around the world through essay competitions, art competitions, and video competitions centered on psychiatry themes. Regarding the essay competition, the Working Group received more than 150 entries from 39 different countries on the topic of "Breaking the silence: how is stigma a barrier to mental health". The top 16 essays selected by an international panel of psychiatrists were published in a WPA e-book. An art competition was organized during the WPA Thematic Congress in Lahore, Pakistan, in March 2022, featuring undergraduate and postgraduate medical students and allied health students interested in psychiatry. Finally, at the WPA Regional Congress in Kolkata, India, in April 2023, a brief video competition was organized on the theme "The importance of psychiatry in the medical field". Twenty-seven videos were submitted by undergraduate medical students from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Working Group is also active in scholar-

ship regarding undergraduate medical education and psychiatry. The activities are accessible on the dedicated section of the WPA website ([www.wpanet.org/wg-on-medical-students](http://www.wpanet.org/wg-on-medical-students)).

Future directions include: a) to organize additional essay competitions to promote psychiatry as a career; b) to publish a survey about psychiatry curriculum in medical education across medical schools in different countries; c) to engage in virtual and in-person activities to promote psychiatry among medical students and to address burnout among students; d) to liaison with regional and international organizations to promote psychiatry; e) to deliver presentations at WPA congresses and other national and international conferences; and f) to implement social media and video campaigns to promote psychiatry.

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