

An Integrative Approach to Training in Psychotherapy — EPA Summer School 2018

Authors: Bárbara Moura^{1,2}, Saša Kocijančič³, Elona Dashi⁴, Camille Noël⁵, Charles So^{2,6}, Rita Gonçalves⁷, Elvira Anna Carbone⁸, Gerard Anmella⁹, Justo Pinzón⁹, Yugesh Rai¹⁰.

¹ Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, Centro Hospitalar Vila Nova de Gaia/Espinho (Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal).

² EFPT Psychotherapy Working Group.

³ General Hospital Novo Mesto (Novo Mesto, Slovenia).

⁴ Department of Neuroscience, University Hospital Center "Mother Teresa" (Tirane, Albania).

⁵ Early Career Psychiatrists Section of the World Psychiatric Association (Brussels, Belgium).

⁶ University of Tours, University of Paris Descartes (Paris, France).

Corresponding Author: Bárbara Moura (barbaramoura@gmail.com)

⁷ Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Hospital Pediátrico, Centro Hospitalar e Universitário de Coimbra (Coimbra, Portugal).

⁸ Department of Psychiatry, University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" (Naples, Italy).

⁹ Department of Adult Psychiatry and Psychology, Institute of Neurosciences, Hospital Clínic (Barcelona, Spain).

¹⁰ Essex Partnership University NHS Trust, Colchester, UK.

Introduction

About the EPA Summer School

The European Psychiatric Association (EPA) has long established as one of its missions to promote access to psychiatry and mental health care professionals to excellence in education, research and training. The EPA Summer School is an example of the opportunities provided for young European psychiatrists. Since its inception in 2011, it has provided a total of 199 scholars from all over Europe an interactive, practical training experience. The first editions focused on comorbidity between mental and physical disorders. For the last three years, the chosen theme has been "ABCs of Psychotherapy".

Training in Psychotherapy

A working knowledge of psychotherapy is essential in the practice of psychiatry. The European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS) Section of Psychiatry has established that training programmes must include theoretical and practical exposure to psychotherapy, including supervised practice (1). Despite this, training opportunities are not available at the same level for all psychiatric trainees in Europe. On average, only one out of five trainees reports receiving training in this area, with 40% seeking it on their own initiative (2). In light of this gap, the choice of the Summer School theme proves its relevance for young psychiatrists.

Methods

Setting

The 8th EPA Summer School took place in Strasbourg (France), from 6 to 9 September 2018. The Opening Ceremony was held at the EPA Head Office, where participants were welcomed by the organising staff and faculty, and had the chance to talk and get to know each other, in a friendly and open environment that would set the tone for the following days. All lectures were held at the European Youth Center, where lodging was also provided for scholars. The course was taught entirely in English. On an average, each day consisted out of evenly distributed lectures and workshops in the morning and afternoon. Each part was subdivided into hourly long periods, with regular breaks in order to maintain concentration and focus, and allow discussion and the exchange of ideas between scholars. Evenings were concluded with a social programme - dinner for all the participants, which was a place to share comments and impressions of the sessions. At each table sat a professor/specialist that was able to put to rest the last of the questions of the day, which proved to be a very valuable moment of learning in a more laid back setting.

Participants

27 scholars from 19 different countries were selected to attend, based on their CV, motivational letters and letters of recommendation from their department heads. After a pre-selection, fluency in the course language (English) was evaluated through an online interview. A spirit of openness and the ability to work in collaboration with others were not written in as requirements, but all participants without exception demonstrated these qualities.

Table 1. List of Scholars of the EPA Summer School 2018 - in alphabetical order by country of origin

Elona Dashi (Albania)
Natalia Sergeeva (Belarus)
Camille Noël (Belgium)
Elise Wuyts (Belgium)
Martin Hejzlar (Czech Republic)
Jiří Renka (Czech Republic)
Porin Makaric (Croatia)
Triin Arbo (Estonia)
Milena Ginters (Finland)
Charles So (France)

Ana Kuzmanovic (Germany)
Elvira Anna Carbone (Italy)
Maria Rosaria Malerba (Italy)
Ieva Viltrakyte (Lithuania)
Andrzej Juryk (Poland)
Maria Rita Marques Gonçalves
(Portugal)
Bárbara Moura (Portugal)
Laura-Diana Gherman (Romania)
Alina-Ruxandra Haiduc (Romania)

Saša Kocijančič (Slovenia)
Gerard Anmella Diaz (Spain)
Justo Pinzón Espinosa (Spain)
Safak Eeray (Turkey)
Helin Yılmaz Kafalı (Turkey)
Valeriia Volovyk (Ukraine)
Shivan Mahabir (United Kingdom)
Yugesh Rai (United Kingdom)

Faculty

The course curriculum was delivered by a team with great experience not only in psychotherapy, but also from an educational standpoint, and which included members of the EPA Committee on Education, Dr. Cécile Hanon (EPA Secretary for Education), Dr. Julian Beezhold and Dr. Defne Eraslan, renowned scholars of different psychotherapeutic approaches, namely Dr. Marc Hermans, in Family and Systems Therapy (FST), Dr. Stirling Moorey, in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), and Prof. Yves Sarfati, in Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Therapy, as well as former President of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), Prof. Norman Sartorius.

Materials

A neatly organised room in which all sat in a circle was provided, facilitating face-to-face discussion. Each lecture or workshop had the scholars actively communicating with the professors, who actively encouraged participation. Some of the practical workshops and lectures relied on the collaboration of a professional actress who played different patients, including a filmed simulation in which an individual scholar interviewed her while the other participants and faculty watched live in the adjacent room. Each participant received materials to prepare in advance, which all found helpful and relevant to the training. Completion of the 1st EPA Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on CBT was also required, and proved to be a valuable introduction as concerning the CBT workshops. Other than that, the main material was the scholars' knowledge and ideas being freely interchanged amongst each other and the teachers, and by that gaining a very rich discussion and a better understanding of the topic.

Course Overview

Theoretical Sessions

1. Family and system therapy interventions

A clear and concise introduction to the basic concepts and methods used in FST, taught by Dr. Marc Hermans, who established from the first moment a great group dynamic, and incited all scholars not familiar with FST to learn more.

2. Initiation to psychodynamic practice and theoretical links with neurosciences

Introduction to the mechanisms of perception and the concepts of cognitive unconscious and Freudian unconscious, and their applicability in psychodynamic formulation, a definitely new and fascinating approach by Prof. Yves Sarfati.

3. Similarities and differences between CBT and psychoanalysis

Comparison of the concepts of unconscious, defense, and the importance of the therapeutic relationship in CBT and Psychoanalysis, taught by Dr. Stirling Moorey. The side-by-side comparison was found useful by all scholars.

4. Ethical issues in psychotherapy

Discussion of ethical issues in psychotherapeutic and psychiatric practice in general, based on clinical case vignettes, led by Prof. Norman Sartorius. No matter the background, ethics was established as an essential part of our practice, and each case allowed for a healthy exchange of ideas between participants and faculty.

5. Clinical Case Evaluation from different psychotherapeutic approaches

Presentation of a clinical case by Dr. Cécile Hanon to the scholars, followed by sequential simulations of clinical interviews (with the actress playing the patient) by Dr. Stirling Moorey, Prof. Yves Sarfati, and Dr. Marc Hermans, with later discussion and comparison of each approach. This session was amongst the participants' favorites, for several reasons. Not only was the case a very interesting and challenging one, with multiple complexities in terms of formulation and intervention, but none of the scholars had had the opportunity to so directly compare different approaches, and reflect on their differences and similarities. The feedback from the actress about how she felt during each interview was especially insightful. In the end, all agreed the "patient" benefited from each intervention, and that despite their differences there are many common therapeutic factors contributing to the outcome of each psychotherapy.

Practical Sessions

1. Simulation Course

Filmed role-play of psychiatric evaluation by scholars, with an actress playing the patient in two different clinical situations, with live viewing by the rest of the group, who later were encouraged to discuss perceived strong points and challenges in a constructive manner. Many of the participants had never experienced this sort of training opportunity, and all gladly embraced the exercise and later discussion. Discussion led by Dr. Julian Beezhold and Dr. Defne Eraslan.

2. Clinical Case Presentations by scholars

Five scholars were asked in advance to prepare and present a clinical case they had observed in their practice, and in which they had applied psychotherapy or would like insights on how to proceed, with discussion promoted by the entire faculty.

3. Clinical Case Role-Play Sessions

- a. CBT approach - Role-play of clinical cases from the scholars' clinical practice, in which the scholar played the patient and Dr. Stirling Moorey played the therapist, with a review of CBT evaluation and intervention methods.
- b. Family and Systems approach - Role-play of a Family Therapy session, in which a group of scholars were given information to play each member, and others played the therapist, with discussion led by Dr. Marc Hermans.

In both sessions, playing the patient (and the patient's family) was definitely not easy, but it provided a different perspective very relevant to our formulation of the case, and we learned a lot from seeing experienced psychotherapists in action, and receiving their insight about our performance.

4. Clinical Case Discussion — Psychodynamic Approach

Presentation of a clinical case and exercises in a psychodynamic formulation, led by Prof. Yves Sarfati. All scholars, no matter their degree of familiarity with the psychodynamic approach, found this discussion quite interesting and enlightening.

Beyond psychotherapy — Presentation and communication skills

Some scholars were asked to prepare a 10-minute presentation on a topic of their choosing in advance, and two were asked to give a presentation on the topic "What we learned at the EPA Summer School". After each presentation, other scholars, along with Prof. Norman Sartorius, discussed the aspects that struck the most positive in each speaker's performance, as well as aspects with room for improvement. While the criticism by Prof. Sartorius can be tough, all presenters saw their work valued and improved by the constructive remarks from colleagues and faculty, and noteworthy pointers were registered by all.

Social Programme and Networking

The city of Strasbourg was a lovely setting not only for the course itself, but also for some moments of leisure, exploring, and networking. This choice wasn't coincidental, given the strategic position of Strasbourg in Europe — it is the official home of the European Parliament, of which a guided tour was organised for the scholars. The EPA Summer School also plays a strategic role in our psychotherapy education, being the meeting area of trainees from all over the world. Strasbourg has another significance for psychiatrists all over Europe because it is the city in which the EPA (or at that time called the Association of European Psychiatrists - AEP) was founded in 1983. The objective of the organisation is to promote research, treatment and teaching, which makes it even more fitting, that trainees meet there to do exactly that; exchanging ideas, points of views and learning much more than just psychotherapy.(3)

Conclusions

The 8th EPA Summer School was a great experience for all participants and an important opportunity to get involved and learn about the ABCs of psychotherapy, working in small groups, discussing each other on clinical cases as well as exchanging ideas on ethical issues. The experts' guidance and supervision were precious, enabling participants to learn about different models of psychotherapy and therapeutic interventions, and to use them in clinical practise. The interaction among psychiatrists from different European countries made possible a discussion of how psychiatry is practiced throughout Europe, and about the differences in psychotherapy training.

In summary, the EPA Summer School is an equally demanding and rewarding programme that challenges trainees and early career psychiatrist's knowledge and practice in psychotherapy. Particular emphasis was given to the psychotherapy training as an integral part of the curriculum in psychiatry, to equip psychiatry trainees and Early Career Psychiatrists with the necessary tools to deliver the best possible care to patients. An international network of enthusiastic psychiatrists was established during the Summer School, opening possibilities for further collaboration.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of all scholars who participated in the 8th EPA Summer School, the authors would like to thank Dr. Cécile Hanon, Dr. Marc Hermans, Dr. Stirling Moorey, Prof. Yves Sarfati, Prof. Norman Sartorius, Dr. Julian Beezhold and Dr. Defne Eraslan, for the exceptional learning opportunities they provided, and their untiring will to answer our questions. We would also like to thank Ms. Lara Le Noan and Ms. Bryane Joamanato (EPA Administrative Office) for their role in the organisation of this event, as well as Ms. Seçil Akmirza, who through her performances helped us train our skills. Finally, we want to express our gratitude to all scholars, who were essential components of this learning experience, without whom it wouldn't have been as interesting and productive.

References

- (1) UEMS Section of Psychiatry “*Charter on Training of Medical Specialists in the EU — Training Requirements for the Specialty of Psychiatry*” (2017).
- (2) Gargot T, et al. “*How is psychotherapy training perceived by psychiatric trainees? A cross-sectional observational study in Europe*”. *European Psychiatry* 45 (2017) 136-138.
- (3) “About EPA”, retrieved from <https://www.europsy.net/about-epa/>.