

A Comprehensive Initiation into Psychotherapy:

Recounting the Interactive Experience of the 7th EPA Summer School

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Psychotherapy is acknowledged as a necessary and effective therapeutic method when used appropriately.[1] The process of any psychotherapy training is a period that requires a combination of practical mentoring and theoretical education. A standardised and high-quality training is indisputably important for both psychiatrists and their patients.

However, there are differences in psychotherapy training of early career psychiatrists among the European countries, concerning formal regulations, financing, integration into psychiatry education and qualification specifications. Such wide-span challenges result in significant disparities between the psychotherapy practices, potentially impeding the harmonisation and the improvement of the mental health care across Europe.

As a leading and progressive organisation, the European Psychiatric Association (EPA) recognises these issues in psychotherapy training, as well as the importance of gaining communication and basic psychotherapy skills for the early career psychiatrists. Therefore, the topic of „ABCs of Psychotherapy” was chosen for the Summer School in 2017, similar to the previous year.

Twenty-five scholars under the age of forty from sixteen different countries were selected based on their CV, motivational letters and letters of recommendation from their senior colleagues to be a part of the 7th EPA Summer School. An evaluation of the candidates' competency in English was made via online interviews. The course took place in the picturesque city of Strasbourg, France from September 7th to September 10th, 2017, and a vibrant group of psychiatry trainees was given an opportunity to learn from renowned faculty members such as Prof. Norman Sartorius, Prof. Yves Sarfati, Dr. Marc Hermans and Dr. Stirling Moorey who delivered a fundamental introduction and vision that attendees can continue to build upon.

During the intense four-day course, participants were provided with invaluable experience and insight on different types of psychotherapy through interactive lectures, role plays and simulation sessions. In addition to this, the

Summer School enabled early career psychiatrists to connect with peers from all parts of Europe, forge new friendships and exchange knowledge and experience, as well as to compare residency and psychotherapy training programmes in different countries. In this article, we intend to describe what the Summer School experience was like, highlighting the important outcomes on psychotherapy training and more.

Overview of the Course Programme

The Summer School started with scholars and some of the faculty gathering and visiting the European Parliament in Strasbourg. It was a nice bonus of the Summer School, by which we had the chance to learn more about the past and prospective achievements of the European Union. That was followed by the welcome cocktail hosted at the EPA Head Office. After listening to the presentations of the EPA President Prof. Silvana Galderisi, EPA Secretary for Education Dr. Cecile Hanon and Council of Europe's Bioethics Unit Administrator Ms. Katrin Uerpmann, we went on to have an introduction session where we presented ourselves in an interactive way. The evening had a casual set up and allowed us to mingle with the faculty as well as our fellow trainees for a warm start up.

The second day began with a thorough presentation by Dr. Marc Hermans on the origins of psychotherapy practice, the evolution of certain schools, the differences and commonalities between those and what can be expected in the field for the future. He also introduced us to some common 'psychotherapy terminology'. Here we shouldn't forget to mention that the faculty had been considerate enough to give us a reading list ahead of the Summer School as a guide to help us prepare before the sessions.

After this, we split into two groups for two activities we would do in turns: a role play and a simulation session. These two were by far the most memorable highlights of the Summer School as with both of them, we had the chance to interactively test our skills in dealing with complex clinical situations.

The simulation session was led by Dr. Julian Beezhold and Dr. Tanja Svirskis, from the EPA Committee on Education, and we were introduced to this innovative way of being trained in leading a medical encounter. The setting was filmed in real time. A professional actress was playing the role of a patient and we alternatively rotated to interview her. The supervisors guided our communication with the patient and they facilitated a totally nonjudgmental setting for the mutual debriefing. Through these sessions, we also had the invaluable opportunity to get unbiased feedback from the 'patient' herself, who delivered a very authentic performance.

Then, Prof. Yves Sarfati held a trailblazing presentation on the relationship between Freudian psychoanalysis and neurosciences. Two disciplines that could be considered at two distant edges of psychiatry were dexterously combined by scientific facts, and we were really impressed by Prof. Yves Sarfati's innovative point of view and exceptional communication skills.

At the end of day two, participants took part in a role play which was moderated chiefly by Dr. Marc Hermans. We had been asked to volunteer for this activity the day before, and volunteers had received the story line of the character he/she would be playing. The scenario was about an adolescent girl who had complicated family relationships and being on the other side of the couch, no matter how briefly, was really interesting. It was also great to see child and adolescent psychiatry acknowledged in the Summer School like that, and we got to see first-hand how systemic therapy can be an essential tool when dealing with such complex cases.

A very necessary and skilfully put together presentation on transference and countertransference by Dr. Stirling Mooney started the third day. That was a great choice of topic as it considered not only psychotherapeutic approaches, but our everyday practice as well.

It was followed by an impromptu simulation session focused on a female patient who struggled with motherhood and we were demonstrated how it could be handled through an analytical perspective by Prof. Yves Sarfati. That was another great opportunity to interactively learn about different paths to take while deciphering a patient.

We spent the next few hours with the faculty, discussing different cases through different psychotherapy approaches. Dr. Stirling Mooney, shared a video of one of his own cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) cases to

explain the key aspects of the CBT practice. After that, Prof. Yves Sarfati presented the case of a patient to depict how seemingly unrelated elements of a patient's history can turn out to be vital information in a psychodynamic approach. The most valuable part of this session was that the faculty shared their views on each case, whether it belonged to their own school or not, and showed that although some patients might seem more suitable for a certain type of psychotherapeutic approach, various interpretations can also lead to a solution and as Prof. Yves Sarfati wisely stated "each of them is just a way of explaining a case".

In the afternoon of the third day, we had the privilege of meeting Prof. Norman Sartorius and together we discussed some ethical issues in psychiatry, and rediscovered how easy it can be with our jobs to get caught up in the middle of moral dilemmas. Again, it was another essential theme that every young psychiatrist could benefit from.

At the last session of day three, we continued going over different cases with the faculty. Having the chance to brainstorm interactively, asking questions to top names in their own fields and hearing them interpreting the cases was surely a mind-opening experience on many levels.

On our last day, Prof. Norman Sartorius gave his presentation on "How to make a presentation". Needless to say, it was another major topic for an early career psychiatrist, with him giving us important tips based on his own experience and also reminding us to reevaluate our technique if we expect effective results.

[The State of Psychotherapy Training in Europe](#)

During the final session of the Summer School, we were given a brief lecture about the three levels of psychotherapy training and asked to come up with a plan to build an integrated system of psychiatry and psychotherapy education. For that, we were instructed to work in small groups and try and assess the current state of the psychotherapy training throughout Europe based on our own experiences and discuss the potential ways of improving it.

This turned into a great opportunity as it helped us learn more about each other's national take on psychotherapy training. We learned that there is no standardised approach throughout Europe, for example, some countries require that you go under an individual 2- year programme to become a therapist, whereas some others have it within their existing psychiatry training curricula. Even though some systems may seem to have it under control, an effective distribution of psychotherapy training is hindered by high costs paid out of the trainees' own pockets. We also realised that there is a lack of legal regulation about the content and duration and even the qualification of a therapist in most countries to the extent that anyone with a college degree can start a therapy practice in some cases. Even though changes are planned, it was obvious that a bigger scale training programme that all European countries can follow is an urgent need. Later that day we presented each group's "game plan" to improve the psychotherapy training conditions throughout Europe.

This particular part of the Summer School was really important as it gave us, young psychiatrists, a sense of inclusion, made us believe and see that our opinions matter.

[An Opportunity for Social/Professional Networking](#)

Attending the 7th EPA Summer School was a great privilege for us all. The number of participants seemed to be optimal for the teaching process as well as for informal communication. From the opening ceremony to the closing, a cheerful and supportive atmosphere surrounded the event. Although we worked diligently, we were all eager to participate in social activities and dinners organized by the EPA after classes where we were able to exchange experiences and get to know each other better, not only with peers, but also with lecturers.

Having the chance to speak with the faculty members in an informal setting, getting to know about their lives, hearing them talk about their own itineraries, careers and past adventures as young doctors was priceless.

Here, we should also emphasize the selection of the faculty, as we benefited a great deal from their input and remain grateful to each of them for being at least as enthusiastic as we were about this school and never losing their patience with us.

Although the theme of the Summer School was psychotherapy, it was also an important opportunity for networking. The whole EPA Summer School experience showed us that young psychiatrists from different cultures and countries, even from those with political disputes and troubling pasts, can work together and learn a lot from each other and we all felt this could be a good starting point for the creation of a network among young people interested in psychiatry. Even before returning to our homes, we had already connected through social networks and started sharing information about congresses and inviting each other to psychiatric events in our countries and even discussing future cooperations in the scientific field. Some of us have already met again, not just as colleagues, but also as friends. Memories made in Strasbourg, and hopefully some of the friendships, will probably last a lifetime.

Conclusions

As shown above, the EPA Summer School is a great opportunity for a number of reasons:

- 1) Learning about different models of psychotherapy and engaging in practical training;
- 2) Discussing the differences in psychotherapy training among European countries;
- 3) Establishing a networking community among junior European psychiatrists and with experienced faculty members.

Both the location and the funding of the EPA course add to this enriching interaction's accessibility and we hope that the course will be held as successfully in the coming years.

References:

- 1- The empirical status of cognitive-behavioral therapy: a review of meta-analyses. Butler AC, Chapman JE, Forman EM, Beck AT.