



EPA GAINING EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME REPORT

**On the observership visit at the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust
London, UK**

**Realised from 10 April to 8 May, 2019
By Dr. Tomasz M. Gondek**

REPORT:

Coming to Great Britain during a very delicate moment for the country, when the fate of Brexit was in balance, was perceived by me as an extremely interesting experience. I wondered to what extent the ongoing political turmoil might influence the daily work of mental health professionals. When I got to the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust neurodevelopmental disorders clinic located at the Bethlem hospital, it quickly turned out that politics, even in everyday conversations, is completely out of the way when the efforts of the whole team are focused primarily on helping patients.

And indeed the patients needed comprehensive care. Based on the characteristics of the hosting institutions offering placements in the EPA Gaining Experience Programme, I have chosen the neurodevelopmental disorders outpatient clinic for adults, offering care for persons with intellectual disabilities, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder/attention-deficit disorder and autism spectrum disorders. In Poland there are no such specialized facilities for adults with this kind of disorders, it is an area which is rather neglected from the mental health care system perspective, this is why it was very valuable for me to see how such a unit function in another country.

I was lucky to have Dr. Vesna Jordanova, Consultant Psychiatrist in Learning Disabilities, as my Gaining Experience Programme supervisor. Dr. Jordanova is also a prominent researcher in the area of neurodevelopmental disorders. My placement under her direction had therefore two dimensions: clinical and scientific. I had the possibility to shadow her during the consultations of outpatients as well as go to home visits with a community mental health team. On the other hand, straight away from the first day I got involved in research activities: validation of a newly-designed questionnaire to assess the symptoms of ADHD in adults and preparation of a scientific article on mathematical learning difficulties. Communication with Dr. Jordanova was excellent, she is a patient and dedicated teacher who devoted a lot of her time to explain all the nuances of the functioning of the whole facility and the process of the management of mental disorders at the clinic. We worked together on a daily basis and in case of any questions I had the possibility to ask her at any time. The scientific collaboration we had begun in London is ongoing and we are still in touch. I hope it can continue also in the future with regard to our possible new research projects.



However, it was not only my supervisor I got the chance to learn from. During my placement I got thoroughly involved in the work of the whole team of mental health professionals: consultant doctors, psychiatric trainees and interns, psychiatric nurses, therapists and social workers. I also took part in the weekly team meetings. It was interesting to see how the members of the unit collaborate and interact. I certainly felt welcomed and supported by the whole group of professionals working at the clinic. I also had the possibility to attend the lectures at the Maudsley hospital with the trainees working in this NHS Trust, which gave my internship an additional educational aspect.

I have not encountered any real problems during my placement at South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. It has turned out the only demanding question were the lengthy bureaucratic procedures which were necessary to be prepared before the placement. However, those are the matters of the local legal determinants, so it is understandable - it nevertheless takes plenty of time to gather all the necessary documents and fulfill all the requirements. London is an expensive city, also the distances to travel every day to work are quite long, but it is well known beforehand.

All in all, my observership in London has been one of the very important moments of my professional career. I learned how to effectively treat ADHD/ADD, how to manage complex difficulties of adults with autism or intellectual disability as well as how to work as a member of a community mental health team. After this experience I have decided to particularly focus on this area of psychiatry in my further development as an early-career psychiatrist. I also will definitely plan to disseminate what I have learned through the presentations and lectures we are preparing for psychiatric trainees and ECPs within the Specialty Training Section of the Polish Psychiatric Association as well as the students at our local students' scientific clubs. The presentation for our colleagues on my observership and the EPA Gaining Experience Programme has already been scheduled.