



EPA GAINING EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME REPORT

On the observership at the **Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust,**
United Kingdom

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By **Marta Demkow-Jania**

As the participant of the EPA Gaining Experience Program 2024/2025, I had the privilege of undertaking a clinical observership at the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust in the United Kingdom. This was my very first hands-on experience in forensic psychiatry, and I approached it with a great sense of curiosity and excitement, hoping to determine whether this field could become a key part of my future psychiatric practice.

I was introduced to the program and mentored throughout by Dr. Vivek Furtado, whose guidance and support were invaluable. Most of my time was spent at the Tamarind Centre, a medium secure forensic psychiatric hospital, where I was warmly welcomed by the entire team—including consultants, junior doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals. I had the opportunity to observe and participate in numerous Clinical Team Meetings (CTMs), which provided insight into the dynamic and collaborative nature of multidisciplinary teams. It was truly inspiring to witness how nurses, psychologists, occupational therapists, and doctors work hand-in-hand, delivering holistic, patient-centered care that often leads to significant behavioral and psychological improvements in patients with complex needs.

Thanks to Dr. Moro, I was also able to visit the Forensic Intensive Recovery Support Team (FIRST), which works with patients in community settings. A particularly memorable moment was joining him for patient meetings in a 'training apartment'—a transitional living space that prepares patients for reintegration into the community. Observing therapeutic interactions in such a setting gave me a new appreciation for the continuum of forensic care, and how crucial the step-down process is in promoting recovery and independence.

In addition, I had the unique opportunity to witness the interface between forensic psychiatry and the criminal justice system. I attended two court hearings involving the admission of expert witness testimony—one conducted via videoconference and another in person. These experiences offered rare and valuable insight into how psychiatric evaluations inform legal decisions. Thanks to Dr. Puri, I also had the chance to observe the evaluation of a patient at a police department, which opened my eyes to the importance of collaboration between law enforcement and mental health professionals. Their joint efforts in risk assessment and safeguarding were particularly impactful.

Furthermore, under the guidance of Dr. Furtado and Dr. Raj, I visited a prison clinic, which added another layer of understanding to the broader picture of forensic services in the UK.



Seeing firsthand how psychiatric care is delivered within correctional facilities deepened my appreciation for the clinical challenges faced by professionals in such environments.

My observership also extended beyond forensic settings. I accompanied Dr. Furtado to a geriatric psychiatry unit, where we conducted a mental health assessment of an older adult. This brief, yet enriching experience allowed me to reflect on the differences in clinical approaches and systemic priorities between our countries when it comes to elderly care.

Alongside the clinical exposure, I was also introduced to the academic life of the Trust. I attended several high-level lectures delivered by prominent UK professors on topics such as child and adolescent psychiatry, the historical evolution of psychiatric care, and the sociocultural context of mental illness in the UK. These sessions broadened my intellectual perspective and deepened my understanding of psychiatry beyond the clinical setting. As the coordinator of a treatment-resistant depression program involving esketamine at my home institution, I was also given the opportunity to conduct a seminar for the local team on the practical aspects of esketamine therapy, which was met with interest and sparked engaging discussions.

This observership fully met my expectations, both in terms of exposure to the UK mental health system and hands-on clinical learning. The staff were exceptionally kind, open, and accommodating. I was given the autonomy to tailor my schedule according to my interests, which made the experience all the more meaningful and productive. I left Birmingham inspired, enriched, and with a deepened desire to further explore the field of forensic psychiatry. I highly recommend this observership for anyone interested in this specific field of psychiatry.

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