

Interview – Gaining Experience Programme Host Institutions
Ilaria Riboldi, Fondazione IRCCS San Gerardo dei Tintori, Monza, Italy

1. Could you start by telling us a little about your institution, what led it to become a GEP host and your role in organising the placements?

Fondazione IRCCS San Gerardo dei Tintori in Monza, Italy, is a large academic and research hospital and serves as the reference hospital for the University of Milano-Bicocca. Within this setting, the Unit of Psychiatry, directed by Professor Giuseppe Carrà, is strongly integrated with both clinical care and academic activities, offering broad exposure to hospital-based psychiatry, outpatient care, liaison psychiatry, multidisciplinary work and research.

Our decision to become a GEP host was closely connected to this academic and clinical identity. We felt that our centre could offer early-career psychiatrists a valuable experience in a setting where patient care, training and research are closely interconnected. The GEP programme is an excellent opportunity to promote international exchange, compare different models of psychiatric care and strengthen collaboration among early-career psychiatrists across Europe.

My own role is both clinical and academic. I work as a clinician in the Unit of Psychiatry at Fondazione IRCCS San Gerardo, while also being involved in research activities at the University of Milano-Bicocca. In organising the placement, my role was to help structure the visitor's experience, identify relevant clinical and academic activities, coordinate with colleagues from the unit, and ensure that the observership offered a realistic and meaningful overview of our work.

2. What do you think have been the main benefits and wider impact of hosting an EPA GEP placement for your institution?

Hosting an EPA GEP placement has been beneficial not only for the visiting psychiatrist, but also for our institution. It allowed us to present our model of care to a colleague from another European context and, at the same time, to reflect critically on our own clinical and organisational practices.

One of the main benefits was the exchange of perspectives. Discussing how psychiatric services are organised in different countries helps highlight both the strengths and the challenges of each system. For our team, this generated useful conversations about continuity of care, acute psychiatric management, integration between hospital and community services, multidisciplinary collaboration and the relationship between clinical work and research.

The wider impact has been the strengthening of our international and academic profile. As an IRCCS and a university-affiliated hospital, we are committed not only to clinical excellence, but also to training and research. Hosting a GEP placement contributed to this mission by promoting international networking, encouraging future collaborations

and exposing residents and early-career psychiatrists in our unit to a broader European perspective.

3. As early-career psychiatrists yourselves, how has the experience of being an EPA GEP host shaped your own career development?

From my perspective as an early-career psychiatrist, being involved as a GEP host has been a very valuable experience. My professional activity combines clinical work and research, and the programme allowed me to bring these two dimensions together in an international educational context.

Hosting a colleague from another country encouraged me to explain our clinical pathways, our organisational model and our academic activities in a clearer and more structured way. This process was useful because it required me to reflect on our daily practice, on the rationale behind our clinical decisions, and on how research can be integrated into routine psychiatric care.

It also strengthened my interest in international collaboration. As early-career psychiatrists, we often think of career development in terms of clinical expertise, publications or academic progression. The GEP experience reminded me that networking, mentoring and the exchange of ideas are equally important. It helped me see my role not only as a clinician and researcher within my own institution, but also as part of a wider European psychiatric community.

4. What advice would you give to future GEP hosts?

My advice to future GEP hosts would be to prepare a structured but flexible programme. It is important to give the visiting psychiatrist a clear overview of the institution, but also to adapt the placement to their interests, previous experience and professional goals.

I would also suggest involving different members of the team. Psychiatry is inherently multidisciplinary, and a good observership should allow the visitor to interact not only with psychiatrists, but also with residents, psychologists, nurses, rehabilitation professionals and researchers. This gives a more complete and realistic view of how care is delivered.

Another important point is to include both clinical and academic activities whenever possible. For centres linked to universities or research institutions, the GEP placement can be a good opportunity to show how clinical practice, teaching and research interact in everyday work.

Finally, I would encourage hosts to approach the programme as a mutual learning experience. The aim is not simply to show what we do, but to create a dialogue. Comparing different systems, discussing clinical approaches and sharing research interests can be highly enriching for both the visitor and the host institution.