

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?

University Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče is the largest and one of the oldest psychiatric institutions in Croatia, often regarded as synonymous with psychiatry in Croatia. Since it was founded, it served both as a place for treatment of psychiatric patients but also as an educational hub. Today, University Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče serves as a teaching base for many different faculties and as a national reference center for several areas of psychiatric treatment.

The Hospital has been deeply involved in different exchange programs for many years and it was “natural” to be involved in this one, too. Vrapče Hospital is one of the few institutions that offers free accommodation and meals to its exchange doctors, which serves as the best possible proof of commitment to such programs.

In organizing these placements, my role is to act as a sort of bridge between exchange psychiatrists and our institution. My goal is to ensure that the visiting doctor is not just watching the treatment process from the sidelines, but is actively integrated into the medical team. I find it very important to make them feel accepted and to get along well with my colleagues by initiating social interactions.

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

The primary benefit is the exchange of knowledge and perspectives. It forces us to reflect on our own routines, such as department layouts or therapeutic structures, through the eyes of a colleague coming from a completely different setting. Discussing pharmacotherapeutic algorithms or psychotherapeutic modalities used elsewhere in Europe enriches our own clinical reasoning. Exchanges also expand our professional network and can initiate collaborations, such as scientific projects.

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

As an early-career psychiatrist, I consider serving as a host as a learning opportunity. It helps shape my professional development by improving my mentoring skills, growing my professional network and providing me with new opportunities for future collaborations. Mentoring a peer also helps sharpening my clinical reasoning and communication skills, which is very important since psychiatry is a discipline where communication is our primary tool.

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

My advice to future hosts is to be generous in terms of providing exchange psychiatrists with as many different experience opportunities as possible. University Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče has a culture of offering exchanges to almost all of our departments and being flexible in making arrangements according to the needs and wishes of our guests. Also, showing the challenges of our daily work is just as important as showing the things we excel in, because the best learning opportunities often arise from situations where we struggle. Finally, it is very important to provide participants with the opportunity to present their home institution’s work as this practice promotes a true exchange and gives valuable insights to the host institution’s staff.