



EPA GAINING EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME REPORT

On the observership at the Queen Mary Hospital. East London NHS Foundation Trust. Perinatal Mental Health Services.

Realised "4th of May – 15th of May"

By "*Irene Pérez Sagaseta de Ilurdoz*"

My observership at the different Perinatal Mental Health Services at East London NHS Foundation Trust was an enriching and inspiring experience that fully met my expectations. My main objective was to gain a deeper understanding of how perinatal mental health services are organised and delivered in the UK (as England has been at the forefront of the development of perinatal mental health services, with more than a decade of experience in delivering specialised care in this field) and to explore ideas that could potentially be adapted and implemented in my home institution. The placement provided a comprehensive overview of the different components of perinatal mental health care and allowed me to observe a wide range of clinical settings and professionals.

Although my role was primarily observational, I was actively involved in multiple activities. I attended multidisciplinary team meetings, shadowed psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists and other mental health professionals, participated in clinics and home visits, attended an online perinatal mental health training session, and joined team meetings focused on more specific perinatal mental health issues. I also had the opportunity to visit the Royal London Hospital liaison psychiatry team, shadow the clinical psychologist working at the Fetal Medicine Department and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, attend the Mother and Baby Unit and get to know about other community-based perinatal mental health services.

The observership highlighted the importance of multidisciplinary and integrated care for women during pregnancy and the postpartum period. One of the aspects that impressed me most was the strong community component of the service. I found the approach to be highly patient-centred and respectful of the mother–baby dyad, recognising the importance of supporting both maternal mental health and the developing relationship between mother and baby.

A particularly valuable aspect of this placement was the opportunity to observe clinical practice within a highly diverse and multi-ethnic population. The service demonstrated a strong commitment to culturally competent care, adapting interventions to meet the needs of different communities through the use of cultural mediators, interpreters, and community-based group therapy programmes.

My time in London with the Perinatal team was extremely useful for my professional development. It offered many ideas and examples that could help improve and expand perinatal mental health services in my home hospital. I believe that several aspects of the model I observed



could be adapted to our local context. The experience has motivated me to continue developing this area of clinical practice and has provided valuable inspiration for future service development.

From the very beginning, I felt genuinely welcomed by my supervisor, Dr. Nikolina Jovanovic. She organised an excellent programme that enabled me to gain a global perspective of the service and its different resources. We were in regular contact and she ensured that I was well supported and integrated into the team. She was attentive, flexible and always willing to answer questions and facilitate learning opportunities. Thanks to her careful planning, I was able to spend time with professionals from different disciplines and areas, and observe the various levels of care available within the perinatal mental health pathway.

I also communicated extensively with other staff members across the various services I visited. Everyone was approachable, welcoming, and keen to explain their role and share their expertise. They even offered their contact details to keep in touch in the future.

I did not make a formal presentation about my home institution during the observership. However, I had several informal discussions with staff members about my hospital, our current services, and the challenges and opportunities we face in developing perinatal mental health care.

It would be nice and useful to present my experience with the EPA GEP to my home hospital team. It could inspire other young doctors to apply for the programme and maybe encourage professionals and teams to become hosts themselves.

Overall, I did not encounter any significant problems during the visit. The placement was very well organised, communication was fluent, and all staff members were supportive and welcoming. It provided an inspiring overview of perinatal mental health services and was an exceptionally valuable learning experience. I feel extremely grateful for the opportunity and I would highly recommend this program to other professionals interested in developing expertise in specific mental health services in other countries.