

# Associations of early career psychiatrists worldwide: history, role, and future perspectives

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In response to the multitude of scientific, clinical, and social challenges that psychiatry faces today and the challenges in professional development that go along with them, several associations of early career psychiatrists (ECPs) have been created around the globe in recent years. Participation in these associations promotes local, national, and international sharing of experiences and provides advocacy platforms for improvement of training and working standards. Furthermore, associations of ECPs contribute to networking and to decreasing professional isolation. This paper provides an overview of the aims, structure, and organization of some of the most important international associations of ECPs. Some of the first national associations of ECPs will also be described.

## Keywords:

associations, community building, early career psychiatrists, EFPT, EPA-ECPC, junior psychiatrists, network, professional development, WPA ECPs section, WPA-ECPC

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## Introduction

In recent years, psychiatry has been facing several challenges from scientific, clinical, social, and political viewpoints. If, on the one hand, the development of new techniques of molecular genetics and brain imaging, and of evidence-based psychotherapeutic interventions, as well as the progresses in the identification of social determinants of mental illnesses, has increased the professional armamentarium of psychiatrists, on the other hand these changes have modified the training needs of mental health professionals as well as users' and caregivers' expectations [1,2]. Moreover, these challenges have determined significant changes in psychiatric clinical practice, with a reduction in the prevalence of some 'classic' mental disorders (i.e. catatonic schizophrenia), an increase in others (i.e. substance-abuse disorders and eating disorders), and the appearance of 'new' disorders, such as those related to the pathological use of social media and the internet [3]. Other challenges include the global economic crisis [4], the need to treat mental disturbances in patients belonging to ethnic minorities [5], which is often faced with difficulties in engaging with mental health services [6], the changes in mental health legislations in many countries [7], and the formulation of globalization policies, which led to the need for harmonizing psychiatric training curricula in the different world countries to guarantee the mobility of psychiatrists at an international level [6]. To address all these challenges and the new training needs

resulting from them [2], early career psychiatrists (ECPs) from all over the world founded, autonomously or with the support of senior national and international leaders in psychiatry, peer groups and associations aimed at discussing these issues, exchanging local experiences, and finding shared solutions [7].

In this paper we aim to provide an overview of the most important scientific associations for ECPs that are active worldwide. For each of them we will give a description of their history, aims, and organization, to facilitate readers access to these valuable resources for professional development.

## International associations

### World Psychiatric Association: Early Career Psychiatrists Council

The World Psychiatric Association (WPA), the largest psychiatric association representing more than 200 000 psychiatrists all over the world, developed several initiatives dedicated to ECPs.

The commitment of the WPA toward young psychiatrists started in 1999; during the World Congress of Psychiatry, which took place in Hamburg, a list of fellows were invited to attend the Congress and to establish the first WPA Congress Fellows Network. At the moment, more than 350 ECPs from all over the world are included in this

network and have periodical access to the activities of the WPA [8].

In 2003, the Executive Committee of the WPA created the Young Psychiatrists Council (WPA-YPC), which initially included all psychiatric trainees and ECPs registered to their national psychiatric associations. In 2009, the WPA-YPC was completely restructured and its name changed into the WPA-Early Career Psychiatrists Council (WPA-ECPC), with one ECP being nominated from each WPA Member Society. Nominated ECPs served for a period of three years and were subdivided into five geographic areas according to their country of origin: (a) Europe I, including northern, southern, and western Europe; (b) Europe II, including central and eastern Europe; (c) Asia/Australasia; (d) Africa and the Middle East; and (e) Americas. For each of these areas, a coordinator was elected [8].

#### *Aims*

The objectives of the WPA-ECPC were as follows: (a) upgrade communication concerning ECPs between WPA Member Societies and WPA governance; (b) identify and address problems concerning ECPs; (c) promote ECP participation in the various sectorial activities of the WPA; and (d) promote the professional development of ECPs.

#### *Activities*

During its first term, the WPA-ECPC undertook different activities: (a) the translation of the three sets of slides of the WPA Programme on Depression and Physical Diseases (diabetes, cancer, and heart diseases) in several languages and their adaptation to various national contexts – in particular, the slides on depression and diabetes have been translated into 18 languages (Arabic, Azeri, Bangla, Bosnian, Croatian, Czech, Estonian, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, and Swedish) and are available on the WPA website (<http://www.wpanet.org>). (b) The conduction of surveys on psychotherapy training and practice in Europe, exploring the content of training curricula and self-confidence of ECPs in using the different psychotherapeutic techniques. (c) The development, in collaboration with the WPA Headquarters, of a specific section of the WPA website, including information about the activities of the ECPC as well as other materials (papers, documents, announcements of meetings or publications, reports about personal professional experiences), which may be of interest to ECPs worldwide. (d) The organization of regular symposia at various WPA conferences – reports of the activities of the WPA-ECPC have been published in *World Psychiatry*, the official journal of the Association [8–10].

#### **World Psychiatric Association: Early Career Psychiatrists Scientific Section**

The Council was unfortunately not renewed after its first triennium. After that, and until 2015, ECPs did not have an official entity in the WPA. To ensure that ECPs have an entity within the WPA that is autonomously maintained, a new scientific section for ECPs was proposed in

late 2014 by a group of ECPs who were actively involved in their respective national associations. ECPs from different parts of the world were approached to ensure a worldwide representation. A board was created with the aim to have members from different regions of the world.

In 2015, the WPA Executive Committee officially approved the section. The main purpose of the section is to promote networking and enhance professional exchange among ECPs worldwide. Further information about the section, the board, aims and how to join can be found on the WPA website ([http://www.wpanet.org/detail.php?section\\_id=11&content\\_id=1703](http://www.wpanet.org/detail.php?section_id=11&content_id=1703)).

#### **European Psychiatric Association: Early Career Psychiatrists Committee**

##### *Development*

At the initial invitation of the Board and the Executive Committee of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA), an informal network of European young psychiatrists designed a specific scientific program during the annual EPA congresses. This group of individuals was initially called ‘Young Psychiatrists Program Organizing Committee’, and most of these members have been previously actively involved in the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT). The first committee structure was not an official EPA body, and its goal was to develop a specific congress track for young psychiatrists at the European Congresses in Geneva (2004), Munich (2005), and Nice (2006). After years of commitment, the need to create an officially approved body for young psychiatrists was recognized, and in 2007 the ‘Young Psychiatrists’ Committee’ was officially created with a full committee status. In 2010 the Committee changed its name to ‘Early Career Psychiatrists Committee’, and from 2015 the Committee Chair is a member of the EPA board [11].

##### *Aims*

The EPA-ECPC was created with the following aims: (a) harmonizing psychiatric training standards in Europe; (b) promoting quality in training and education across Europe; (c) evaluating psychiatric training curricula in Europe; (d) understanding young psychiatrists’ and trainees’ opinions about training and the beginning of their professional life; (e) interacting with relevant European and national bodies on training in psychiatry; and (f) promoting and developing national young psychiatrists’ and trainees’ associations. The definition of ‘young psychiatrists’, according to the EPA criteria, refers to (1) all trainees in psychiatry, (2) ECPs within 5 years from completion of training, and (3) psychiatrists younger than 40 years [11].

##### *Early Career Psychiatrists’ Programme*

The Early Career Psychiatrists’ Programme takes place during the annual EPA Congresses and includes specific and dedicated symposia, workshops, meet-the-experts sessions, interactive CME courses, happy-hour meetings, and social events. One of the initial goals of the programme was to facilitate a smooth integration of

young psychiatrists into the annual European Congress of Psychiatry and to allow those rather conference-inexperienced young doctors to network and meet leaders in the field. Therefore, in each Congress a 'lounge' space is dedicated to all young psychiatrists attending the conference and it offers a unique opportunity for young psychiatrists to meet informally and network.

Since 2007 a scholarship programme has been initiated to promote clinical and scientific excellence among European ECPs, by covering their travel and accommodation expenses. Since 2008, a mentorship programme has been implemented, with the involvement of well-known European leaders. Furthermore, to support scientific offspring from ECPs, every year research awards are granted to ECPs who have published the best scientific papers in international journals indexed in Current Contents. Further information is available at <http://www.europsy.net/what-we-do/early-career-psychiatrists/>.

## European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees

### History

The EFPT is the independent federation of national associations of psychiatric trainees in Europe, and it is the first international organization of trainees specialized in any branch of medicine. EFPT, which is officially recognized by the European Board of Psychiatry and the European Board of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, was created in 1992 by the personal initiative of a small group of trainees from nine European countries, and in 1993 the EFPT was formally established [12]. Since the inception of the EFPT, the Federation has significantly grown, now playing a major role in improving psychiatric training across Europe. EFPT is an affiliate member or collaborates very closely with many international associations, such as European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS), EPA, ECNP, ESCAP, IACAPAP, WPA, WHO, and IFMSA. Working in close collaboration with the Section and Board of Psychiatry and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of the UEMS, which is the European body that issues guidance for developing national psychiatric curricula, enables the views of psychiatric trainees to be considered when implementing changes to the training programmes [13,14].

With currently more than 30 member associations, EFPT represents and supports thousands of European psychiatric trainees, in both adult and child and adolescent psychiatry. EFPT supports national trainee associations and helps establish new associations in countries where there is still none. EFPT promotes trainee-led research and uses this unique platform of trainees in Europe to acquire exclusive data about the opinions of trainees and the conditions of their training. Findings from these trials and surveys have been published in many scientific journals and have been presented at major international congresses.

In addition to the working groups' year-round activities, every year the EFPT meets in a Forum, which takes place in the country of origin of the president and which offers trainees the opportunity to exchange experiences and

share good practice. The last Forum took place in 2015 in Porto between 22 and 27 June [15].

### Aims

EFPT's main objective is to contribute to the improvement of medical education in Europe. The main goals are to (a) explore the diversity and richness of training in psychiatry in Europe, (b) support the development of national psychiatric trainees' organizations in all European countries, (c) promote and represent at the international level the views of trainees in all branches of psychiatry, (d) translate discussion into actions at a local level to improve training in psychiatry, and (e) create a network of European psychiatric trainees.

### Organization and activities

The EFPT governing body is the General Assembly, which meets annually during the Forum. It is composed of two delegates from each member country (with one vote per country) and elects the components of the EFPT Board of Directors (president elect, child and adolescent representative, general secretary, IT secretary, treasurer).

The EFPT activities are carried out through working groups addressing issues related to psychiatric training, such as competency-based training, psychotherapy training, research experience, relationship with pharmaceutical industry, and workforce migration [16–18]. As an output of their activities, EFPT working groups produce consensus statements (used to circulate the opinions of psychiatric trainees to the relevant bodies) and scientific publications. EFPT also maintains an international exchange program for short-term clinical visits [19]. Further information is available at the EFPT official website: <http://www.efpt.eu>.

### National associations

In the following sections, the development and main activities of some of the national ECP associations with a longer tradition will be outlined (in the alphabetical order of countries). However, national associations of ECPs and trainees exist in many other countries of the world and new associations are continuously being established.

#### *Australia and New Zealand: Early Career Psychiatrists Section of the Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists*

The RANZCP Early Career Psychiatrists Section was first formed in 2011 with the aim of connecting the college to those who have newly gained their fellowship qualifications and enabling clear channels of communication and information sharing. Functioning initially as a Special Interest Group rather than a national association, it has been formalized as a section of the College of Psychiatrists in 2015. Its formation was designed to offer members starting their career as psychiatrists access to events of specific interest, and toward this aim it has held the ECP workshop at the RANZCP Congress for the last 2 years. In addition, it supports the RANZCP Early Career Psychiatrist Award, which is presented to either an

Early Career Psychiatrist or Psychiatric Trainee who has contributed the most significant research paper published in the last 2 years.

The RANZCP Section of ECPs is a member association of the Asian Federation of Early Career Psychiatrists, underlying its commitment to playing a greater role within the Asia-Pacific region. With this in view, it aims to play an active role in the upcoming International RANZCP Congress of Psychiatry to be held in Hong Kong in May 2016 in collaboration with the Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists to cement its role within the Asia-Pacific framework.

#### *Brazil: Early Career Psychiatrists Section*

The first ECP section in Brazil was organized in 1988 by psychiatry trainees from different teaching hospitals of Porto Alegre, the capital of the southern-most state of Brazil. It first started as a personal desire of these trainees to have a space in which they could interact with residents from other hospitals. Soon after that, the section was officially founded within the Psychiatric Association of Rio Grande do Sul, which is the oldest psychiatric association of the country founded in 1938. The first goal of the section was to congregate residents in psychiatry from the different teaching hospitals of the state. Currently, the specific goals of the section are the following: (a) promote scientific, cultural and social events created and organized by the trainees; (b) stimulate exchange of experiences among the residents; (c) stimulate and enrich the training of the residents, estimating and promoting training experiences at a regional, national, and international level; and (d) promote the exchange of experiences between psychiatry residents and other mental health professionals. The trainees have to be associated with the Psychiatric Association of Rio Grande do Sul (Associação de Psiquiatria do Rio Grande do Sul – APRS) to participate in the section. Traditionally, the local scientific activities organized by the section mainly focus on issues that the residents think are not being fully presented in their own psychiatric training. Activities usually take advantage of the experience of senior colleagues, local professors of psychiatry, and local experts. One of the main characteristics of the Association and of the section is its ability to gently blend the different points of view and different approaches to psychiatry, such as psychoanalysis, biological psychiatry, and cognitive behavioral therapy. The section also has an important role working together with other sections of the association, organizing scientific events for the members of the association, and for the community in general. One of the most popular activities organized for both the members and the community is the discussion of films, when local experts from different fields are invited to discuss the psychiatric aspects of films. Each section board lasts for two to five years depending on the length of residency of the members, as they have to step down when their training is over. To be as representative as possible of all training institutions, the board is preferably formed by trainees from each of the teaching hospitals of the state. Additionally, the

section is responsible for the organization of the annual reception of the new psychiatric trainees of the state, showing them the benefits and possibilities of taking an active role in the section during residency and afterward within the state association. Further information about the section can be found on <http://www.aprs.org.br>.

#### *Egypt's Early Career Psychiatrists: Early Career Psychiatrists Section of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association*

The ECP section of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association was established in 2010 by the efforts of Prof Ahmed Okasha, President of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association. The section aimed at promoting the scientific level of ECPs, providing regular scientific meetings, training courses and workshops, facilitating congresses and scientific activities for ECPs, and most importantly establishing a network between the Egyptian ECPs and their counterparts worldwide.

The section actively responded to the needs of the Egyptian ECPs through several meetings and workshops, covering different areas of psychiatry. The section was also very keen to have activities within different national congresses.

One of the first activities of the section was held during the WPA Regional Meeting in Cairo, January 2011. The ECP section of the Egyptian Psychiatric association, in collaboration with the WPA and the International Society of Addiction Medicine, organized a symposium on 'The Mental Health Gap in Addiction'. Prof Maj, WPA President at that time, delivered an introductory message at the beginning of the symposium. Further information about the symposium can be found on [http://www.wpanet.org/detail.php?section\\_id=22&content\\_id=1052](http://www.wpanet.org/detail.php?section_id=22&content_id=1052).

Another important milestone of the section was the organization of the first International Congress of Early Career Psychiatrists 'Towards Professionalism in Psychiatry', in Cairo, January 2013. The congress was cosponsored by the WPA, EPA and Asian Federation of Psychiatric Associations, and was organized in collaboration with several associations around the world, including the EFPT, the Asian Federation of Early Career Psychiatrists, the Japan Young Psychiatrists Organization (JYPO), the Taiwanese Young Psychiatrists Organization, the Russian Early Career Psychiatrists Council, the Swiss Association of Psychiatric Trainees, the Czech Psychiatric Association, the Belarusian Psychiatric Association, the Young Psychiatrists Network, and the Society for Trans-cultural Psychiatry of the German Speaking Region. Further information about the congress can be found on the WPA website ([http://www.wpanet.org/detail.php?section\\_id=7&category\\_id=24&content\\_id=1428](http://www.wpanet.org/detail.php?section_id=7&category_id=24&content_id=1428)) and on the EPA website (<http://www.europsy.net/about-epa/partners/other-partners>).

The section has had a very positive impact on the national level. The concept of ECPs is now widely accepted and most of the national congresses devote a session or two to ECPs. In 2015, the Ain Shams International Congress of Psychiatry fostered the idea of supporting ECPs and offered the first Fellowship Award

to ECPs. This allowed five ECP candidates from the UK, Germany, Romania, and India to attend and network with their colleagues from Egypt. The experience was very enriching for both the award winners and the Egyptian ECPs [20].

*France: Association Française Fédérative des Etudiants en Psychiatrie*

The AFFEP is an independent association of French psychiatric trainees, founded in 1998, with the following aims: (a) improvement of psychiatric training standards in France; (b) participation in the EFPT; and (c) improvement of psychiatric research. Since 2007, AFFEP represents all postgraduate psychiatric trainees in France, and it is organized as a federation of regional trainees' associations.

AFFEP has promoted several initiatives aimed at the evaluation and improvement of psychiatric training in France. The networking among members is ensured by a dynamic and highly informative website and a mailing list, spreading a guidebook to all new psychiatric trainees. The association elects a representative to the National Council of postgraduate trainees (*Syndicat National des internes, ISNIH*), an official delegate at the annual Forum of the EFPT and an official representative at the National Association of psychiatry (*Fédération Française de Psychiatrie*). AFFEP is a founding member of the French Congress of Psychiatry. Finally, AFFEP organizes educational events specifically dedicated to postgraduate psychiatric trainees, supports the Congress of French Psychiatric Trainees (CNIPSY) and various training events on psychiatric and cultural issues (anthropology, sociology, philosophy, etc.). Further information is available on the official website of the AFFEP: <http://www.affep.fr>.

*Germany: German Young Psychiatrists' and Trainees' Association, German Association For Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Nervous Diseases*

The Association of German Young Psychiatrists and trainees was founded in 2001. It was initially formed as a committee within the national senior psychiatric association. However, already from the outset the creation of a network of psychiatric residents and the collaboration with other national bodies met some important needs of German ECPs. At the same time, several initiatives have been implemented to promote the involvement of young psychiatrists in the annual meetings of the senior association. In a few years, the section was formally established and the structure of its Board defined. Currently, the organization of young psychiatrists and trainees in Germany is well recognized. It is composed of about 3800 young German psychiatrists. Each year, at the congress of the senior association, a 4-day training event for young psychiatrists is organized; in addition, regional training events are regularly held throughout Germany in accordance with the standards of the UEMS. Furthermore, the association is planning specific supervision programs in psychiatry and the creation of a website to facilitate the diffusion of

information on job vacancies for young psychiatrists. Further information is available on the website of the German Association for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Nervous Diseases: <http://www.dgppn.de>.

*Italy: Early Career Psychiatrists Committee of the Italian Psychiatric Society*

The Italian Psychiatric Society (*Società Italiana di Psichiatria, SIP*) has been one of the first scientific psychiatric societies to create a specific program for ECPs in 2000. A special area of the society, dedicated to younger members, was established to facilitate full integration into the activities of the society of the Italian ECPs.

The ECP committee is composed of a president and 17 regional coordinators who meet at least four times a year to produce joint projects and share local experiences. The president of the ECP committee has a seat in the activities of the Executive Committee of the Italian Psychiatric Society.

The principal aim of the committee is to promote the professional development of ECPs, allowing them to satisfy the expectations of patients and keep in pace with the changes in society and scientific advances. To achieve this goal, five areas of work were identified: (a) organization of educational events and activities, on the basis of the ECPs' training needs; (b) identification of strategic areas for the training of ECPs, such as ethics and forensic psychiatry, psychopathology, clinical psychiatry, and psychotherapy; (c) mentorship by more experienced members; (d) collaboration with other national and international societies of young psychiatrists; and (e) conduction of research projects for ECPs and publication of their results [21]. Further information can be found at <http://www.giovanipsichiatrisip.wordpress.com>.

*Japan: Japan Young Psychiatrists Organization*

The JYPO was founded in 2002 with the aim of facilitating communication and collaboration among young psychiatrists and help them in the acquisition of skills and knowledge relevant to their practice, research, and education. The term young psychiatrists refers to medical doctors whose experience is less than 12 years after graduation of medical school and less than 10 years in the field of psychiatry. The current number of members is over a hundred from all over Japan. Since 2008, JYPO is officially recognized as a nonprofit organization in Japan. Its main activity is to organize a 3-day training course entitled the Course for the Academic Development of Psychiatrists (CADP), which was designed by Professor Norman Sartorius for the purpose of developing professional and leadership skills of young psychiatrists. The first CADP was collaboratively organized by the WPA and the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (JSPN) in 2002, and subsequent courses have been annually organized by JYPO. In this course, participants improve their skills of presentation, chairing, writing reports, collaboration with others and so on. In addition, some experts give lectures about their career and future directions. From the 7th CADP, JYPO started inviting

young psychiatrists from overseas [22]. The 14th CADP was held in collaboration with the 5th World Congress of Asian Psychiatry in 2015 with the participation of many international well-known leaders, including Prof Norman Sartorius (former WPA President), Prof Dinesh Bhugra (WPA President), and Prof Masatoshi Takeda (JSPN President). Thus, the CADP is now absolutely popular among young psychiatrists from all over the world. In addition to CADP, activities of JYPO cover lots of other areas including medical statistics workshops, translation of WPA documents, symposia at national and international congresses, multicenter studies and so on. Further information about JYPO can be found on the website: <http://www.jypo.org/en/>.

#### *Portugal: Portuguese Association of Psychiatric Trainees*

The Portuguese Association of Psychiatric Trainees (*Associação Portuguesa de Internos de Psiquiatria – APIP*) was officially established in 2005, defending the interests of psychiatry trainees in Portugal and aiming to improve training in psychiatry in Portugal.

Psychiatry and mental health in Portugal experience organizational and structural problems: a gap between theoretical recommendations and daily practice; lack of annual examinations in all hospitals as required; lack of training in psychotherapy; lack of supervision, etc. Starting with an ad-hoc meeting held in a congress, three main founders from different regions of Portugal (north, central, and south) had the mission of contacting trainees from every hospital with training in psychiatry.

And thus this association was started, progressing from meeting to meeting, facing the difficulties related to starting something new. APIP was created from a real and generalized will to change and improve Portugal's psychiatry training.

APIP's by-laws reflect the desire to be as inclusive and democratic as possible, defining a two-year board that cannot be re-elected, and the president has to mandatorily be on a rotating basis from the three main regions of the country (north, central, and south). Since the founding of APIP, great efforts have been made to reach all trainees, so that each hospital is represented at the National APIP Council of Representatives.

APIP organizes a national congress every 2 years and has surveyed anonymously trainees' opinions about psychiatric training in Portugal, which have been strongly announced and advocated to the national authorities [23,24].

#### *United Kingdom: Royal College of Psychiatrists*

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) is the professional body for psychiatric trainees and psychiatrists in the UK. It leads, represents and supports psychiatrists and works with organisations interested in delivering high quality mental health services. In particular, the RCPsych directly defines standards and procedures for postgraduate training in psychiatry. The Psychiatric Trainees' Committee (PTC), a standing committee of the college, consists of 40 members, elected or appointed from the divisions

(i.e. regional subgroups of England) of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the British Armed Forces. The PTC has many responsibilities: the participation in the general management and supervision of the RCPsych activities (PTC has representatives in all the main committees of the RCPsych); to the formulation and ratification of the main aspects of educational policy, the implementation of periodic reviews of the psychiatric training curriculum, and the definition of its standards. Furthermore, each year the RCPsych organizes its International Conference, during which residents attend workshops and lectures by prominent experts on the management and treatment of major mental disorders. The PTC is actively involved in the preparation of these events and can present the results of their own research projects in specific sessions.

Furthermore, the RCPsych has established the Centre for Advanced Learning and Conferences (CALC), whose aims are to promote high-quality training for postgraduate psychiatric trainees and, in general, for psychiatrists, to facilitate collaboration between sections of the RCPsych and universities, and to organize high-quality training events on specific topics, in all training centers. Further information can be found on the official website of the RCPsych: <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk>.

#### *United States: American Psychiatric Association*

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) organizes during its congresses specific sessions dedicated to ECP – that is young American psychiatrists currently in postgraduate training or who completed their training no more than 7 years ago. Furthermore, the APA has a Committee, the Assembly Committee on Early Career Psychiatrists, whose aim is to promote the professional development of psychiatrists during their early career stages.

The Assembly Committee on Early Career Psychiatrists provides bidirectional communication between APA and its younger members, to enhance the experiences of ECPs within the APA and to promote their professional development. In particular, the main objectives of the Assembly are to: (a) identify and represent the interests of ECPs locally, regionally, and nationally; (b) facilitate participation of ECPs within the APA and its district branches; and (c) contribute to APA policy-making and educational endeavors as they relate to the professional development of ECPs. Further information is available at the APA-Early Career Psychiatrists Program website: <http://www.psych.org/Resources/EarlyCareerPsychiatrists.aspx>.

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## **Conclusion**

Despite the continuous burgeoning of new associations for ECPs and trainees, not all ECPs actively participate in these professional associations. The burden related to clinical activity and the different types of responsibilities that ECPs face during their work often leave little time for other commitments. However, periodically meeting with other ECPs from one's own country or other nations, comparing training programs and clinical experiences,

becoming informed about common challenges and learning how other training programs or work settings do certain things better can provide useful advice for improving training and daily clinical work. Furthermore, joining professional organizations allows ECPs to learn from peers or from seniors about available resources in the community and to get information on trends that directly affect the way mental healthcare is delivered; it also provides avenues to advocate for change that is beneficial to our patients and our profession. Another not less important advantage is the opportunity of enlarging one's own knowledge base and participating actively in the organization of workshops, symposia, and other scientific events. Finally, the establishment of a network with other colleagues may be useful in several ways: (a) to prevent professional isolation and the consequent risk of burn-out, which recent studies have reported to be particularly high in the first stages of a career in psychiatry [25–27]; (b) to facilitate employment opportunities during or after training; and (c) to offer the possibility to meet leaders in the field of psychiatry and obtain mentorship [13], thus providing life-long benefits. For all these reasons, ECP associations can represent relevant tools for the professional development of ECPs.

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## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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