

Young Psychiatrists' Committee of the European Psychiatric Association: an essential tool for the future

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Introduction

In recent years, European psychiatry as a medical discipline has been facing several challenges as a consequence of scientific, cultural, social and legal changes: the availability of new drugs and therapies, the affirmation of the evidence-based medicine (EBM) paradigm, the need to balance the cultural heritage of psychiatry with new knowledge, the shift of mental health from hospital to community-based care, the multicultural society and the enlargement of the European Union, which has given new opportunities to find employment quickly and easily, but which in turn may bring young psychiatrists often very far from their country of origin and from their families and friends (1-2).

To face these difficult challenges, it is essential that young doctors feel being part of peer-groups. In fact, while during their training they usually have tutors and colleagues of the same age and professional degree, the first years after specialist training may represent a phase of their professional life where they feel without guidance and where a sense of loneliness may appear; these feelings, in turn, may constitute risk factors toward burn-out, which has been found to be particularly high among young doctors in recent studies (3-4). One solution to overcome these

difficulties may be affiliation to scientific societies, particularly if they provide members with early career doctors' programs or scientific opportunities.

The European Psychiatric Association (EPA) launched a Young Psychiatrists programme in 2004, with the specific aim to give voice to the younger members of the Association. The definition of "young psychiatrists", according to the criteria of the WPA, refers to: 1) all trainees in psychiatry; 2) early career psychiatrists within five years from completion of training; and 3) being under the age of 40 years.

In this paper, we will describe the EPA young psychiatrists' committee (YPC), will report about its development throughout recent years and will make a projection about the future role of the YPC.

Development

On the initial invitation of the European Psychiatric Association, the YPC started its activities in 2004 as an informal network of European young psychiatrists and designed a specific scientific program during the annual EPA congresses. This group of individuals, named "Young Psychiatrists Program Organizing Committee", had had past involvement in the activities of the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT). However, the committee structure was fragile and was not a part of the official body of EPA, and its only mission was to develop a specific congress track for young psychiatrists at the European Congress of 2004 in Geneva, 2005 in Munich and 2006 in Nice. After years of commitment, the leaders of the European Psychiatric Association recognized the need to create an officially recognized body for young psychiatrists; therefore, in 2007 the "Young Psychiatrists' Committee" was officially created with a full committee status within the EPA.

Aims and structure of EPA-YPC

The EPA YPC aims to give young professionals a voice in the evolution of training, research and practice standards, and to enable them to influence their own future and career progress.

Specifically, the EPA YPC has the following aims: a) to harmonize psychiatric training standards in Europe; b) to promote quality of training across Europe; c) to evaluate psychiatric training in Europe; d) to understand young psychiatrists' and trainees' opinions about training and the first years of their professional life; e) to communicate these opinions to relevant European and

national bodies; f) to promote and develop national young psychiatrists' and trainees' associations (5).

The EPA YPC consists of five members, being the first authors of this paper. Moreover, a group of another five “associate members” are nominated each year, in order to guarantee turn-over and continuity of members. Associate members this year are Stephanie Colin (France), Sonja Gerber (Germany), Amit Malik (UK), Alexander Nawka (Czech Republic), Kajsa Norstrom (Sweden). Further information on YPC can be found at the website www.europsy.net/what-we-do/young-psychiatrists/.

The Young Psychiatrists' Programme

In order to pursue these objectives, the YPC established a Young Psychiatrists' Program to take place during the annual EPA Congresses. This program includes special symposia, workshops, meet-the-experts-sessions, happy-hour meetings with European leaders, interactive CME courses and social events. Since 2008, a mentorship towards Alumni's / scholars has been implemented, with the precious collaboration of well-known EPA leaders. This promising and innovative initiative will be evaluated in the coming year. To support this, research prizes are awarded to young psychiatrists who publish the best scientific papers each year.

One of the initial goals of the programme was to facilitate a smooth integration of young psychiatrists into the annual European Congress and to allow those rather conference-inexperienced young doctors to network and to meet leaders in the psychiatric field. Therefore, in each Congress the “lounge”, a dedicated area of the conference site, is available for the young psychiatrists attending the conference. This lounge, which offers a unique opportunity for young psychiatrists to meet informally, is usually a large space with technical equipment and facilitates networking among young colleagues.

As reported before, this program was first implemented in 2004 and, due to its high level of support and interest, has constantly and significantly expanded, becoming recently an integral part of the annual Congress, with the President and other members of the Executive Committee contributing to special sessions.

Further information on the young psychiatrists programme for the 2010 congress in Munich can be found at the website:

www2.kenes.com/epa/young/Pages/Young_Psychiatrists_Programme.aspx.

Future perspectives

The idea behind the young psychiatrists' program is continuity and sustainability. Thus, in a world of increasing separation, rapid changes and competition, the YP program contributes to the existential goals of the EPA and scientific societies, which are community building and the creation of a feeling of affiliation.

Additionally, the established scholarship program supports clinical and scientific excellence of European young psychiatrists, with special grants for participating in the European Congress and in the many activities of the Association. The benefits for scholars are extended by implementing a mentoring program for scholarship winners to meet leaders and specialists, to ensure the continuity of professional support of highly promising trainees and to start building networks of which the scholars can take advantages in a life-long way.

Conclusions

The EPA Young Psychiatrists' Committee believes that - in addition to clinical experience, scientific background and communication skills - economic expertise, presentation skills, leadership, networking, management know-how, training skills and international competencies are essential educational tools that need to be incorporated in national psychiatric training curricula.

Future psychiatrists need a more comprehensive approach to the profession, as our discipline is a complex one, in which mind and brain cannot be completely separated nor integrated (6-8).

The EPA Young Psychiatrists' Committee is trying to help in the process of building a coherent identity of future European psychiatrists (1,9-10), particularly by promoting activities for young psychiatrists at the European level and by supporting national associations of young psychiatrists in their setup and future implementation.

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