

## WAS IT SUCCESSFUL? A REFLECTION ON THE 3<sup>RD</sup> EPA SUMMER SCHOOL

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*“Getting a unique opportunity”; “I feel I will greatly benefit”; “hope to make the most of this”; “opportunities like the EPA summer school are quite rare and very significant”* - these are a few citations of what participants were expecting from the 3<sup>rd</sup> EPA Summer School. In this article scholars are reflecting if the School could live up to these high expectations and if they found it successful.

### How everything started

The EPA Summer School story continued this year with its third edition. It took place in Strasbourg, the official seat of the European Parliament between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2013. This by now annual summer event is organized since 2011 by the European Psychiatric Association for young psychiatrists up to two years after their specialization. The topic “Comorbidity between mental and physical disorders” was of equally high interest for everyone regardless of the European region they are working in, as literature shows that greater awareness of physical disorder in mentally unwell patients can improve life expectancy and quality of life for populations worldwide (Hert et al., 2011).

Application requirements for the Summer School included a brief CV, a letter of recommendation and a letter of motivation. As sharing the acquired knowledge at a local level was identified as one of the objectives since the first EPA summer school (Pantovic et al., 2011), the applicants were also asked where they could teach on the key topic after completing the School. European trainees’ interest in participating was high and the application process therefore was competitive. The faculty received 59 applications from 24 European countries and selected amongst them the most promising 25 candidates from 18 countries to participate.

Expectations were then raised as prior to the summer school there was an opportunity to learn about the fellow scholars, the faculty and the academic program. In addition, participants were able to contact each other in advance. When the summer school actually began on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June each scholar arrived in Strasbourg with different prospects regarding this event, and dived into a well-balanced amalgam of lectures, workshops, discussions and social program in a fascinating town. Strasbourg is a welcoming city and the combination between the historic city center and the district with magnificent European institutions creates an interesting atmosphere. The accommodation of the

scholars, as well as the lectures, was organized at the European Youth Center, located closely to the European institutions of Strasbourg.

The opening ceremony took place at the Council of Europe - an impressive location, full of history. After a visit at the institution and a warm welcome, there was a brief introduction about the Council of Europe and Bioethics by Laurence Lwoff and a global overview of EPA and its activities was presented by Prof. Henning Sass, followed by a cozy cocktail. This was the first opportunity to interact and to get to know each other, whilst the memorable moments were captured by a photographer.

## Participants

What makes the EPA Summer School a unique experience is certainly the variety of backgrounds of the different scholars. The European idea became truly alive when meeting colleagues from all over Europe and exchanging information on care pathways or therapeutic interventions in the different regions. Although there is much in common, there are also differences that helped to learn and understand more about other systems, but also to get a fresh view of the personal working environment. From the very beginning this exchange was facilitated by the EPA website on which the CVs of the participants were uploaded. It was interesting to read in advance what other participants' backgrounds were, but it was even more interesting to meet them in person and to find out more about each of them. Friendships were quickly made and during a presentation about Cluj-Napoca (Romania), for example, everyone was invited to visit this nice and hospitable city, elected as European Youth Capital for 2015. Following the amusing presentation and some discussions certainly everyone considered travelling to explore Europe more in future. In this multicultural environment young psychiatrists had the opportunity to gain both on professional and on personal level. Very attractive was the additional fact that all participants received an EPA Scholarship covering the costs of the Summer School's educational program, social events and accommodation.

### THE PARTICIPANTS IN ORDER OF COUNTRIES:

**Albania** - Alma Hasalami; **Belgium** - Seline Van Den Ameele; **Bosnia-Herzegovina** - Igor Djujic; **Bulgaria** - Petra Marinova and Maria Stoyanova; **Finland** - Niina Markkula; **Greece** - Diomidis Antoniadis; **Ireland** - Amir Greenfield; **Italy** - Benedetta Demartini; **Montenegro** - Azra Deljkovic; **Netherlands** - Astrid Lugtenburg; **Romania** - Alina Florica Bohus and Maria Magdalena Dumitru; **Serbia** - Nikola Jovanovic; **Slovakia** - Zuzana Vidova; **Spain** - Cristina Abad and Laura Bosqued; **Sweden** - Michael Ioannou and Myrto Sklivanioti; **Turkey** - Betül Demirel Döngel, Sevdenu Kahraman and Necla Keskin; **Ukraine** - Anastasiia Kasianova; **United Kingdom** - Julie Langan and Victoria Witt

## Development and content

Following the initial opening ceremony on the first day the educational program of the Summer School was held over three consecutive days.

Every day, there was a theoretical part. This was usually a lecture providing a setting for more practical case studies, workshops and discussions afterwards. The first day consisted of an introduction of the topic in a lecture on comorbidity of mental and physical disorders by Professor N. Sartorius, who noted that comorbidity is rather the rule than the exception and that it is likely to increase in future. It is becoming the major challenge to health care in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Later on, Professor Sir David Goldberg spoke on comorbidity of depression and diabetes. He explained the reciprocal relationship between depression and physical disorders, and presented as an example the latest findings linking depression and diabetes. He underlined that being aware of this connection was the best way to identify affected patients at an early stage and in consequence to be able to treat them properly. He added useful tips about detection and treatment. After the lecture the participants were working in

small groups; the reports of their discussion were then presented in a plenary followed by general discussion.

The second day started by a lecture by Dr. M. Rojnic Kuzman entitled "Toward a brighter future: The Commitment of EPA for European early career psychiatrist". She explained how EPA offers support for European early career psychiatrists (ECPs) through a number of activities and how the ECP Committee works. Further, she invited all participants to contribute and promote the interests of ECPs across Europe. After her presentation, this day's key topic "Mental disorders and cancer" was introduced by Professor C. Lauber. He said that people with cancer were more likely to be depressed, which leads to lower adherence and decreased survival amongst many other problems in the affected patients. A lively discussion on what could be done to prevent this followed, involving all the participants. Some useful advice was brought up: trying to be helpful in all cases, facilitating communication, providing emotional support, and generally instilling hope, while remaining realistic regarding the prognosis. Professor C. Lauber also presented relevant data on patients with schizophrenia, informing that this population has up to 50% increased risk for somatic illness and up to 20% increased risk for premature death. Having learned those and many more facts in such a comprehensive way, scholars engaged in long discussions, even until the common dinner that night.

On the final day, the key topic "Dealing with comorbidity between mental and physical disorders in general practice" was directed by Dr. H. Parmentier. From his experience as a general practitioner he reported that up to 60% of patients attending primary care clinics have diagnosable mental disorders. In addition, he highlighted that by the year 2020 depression will be the second most important cause of disability worldwide. Considering the importance of mental disorders he outlined the side effects of new antipsychotics and raised the question of whether or not doctors were actually extending survival of patients who undergo neuroleptic treatment. Another critical topic he brought up was the question of whether cardiovascular disease can cause depression, and, vice versa. In general, he promoted joint efforts between primary care and psychiatry to improve care and outcomes of patients with mental health problems.

There were two case studies per day, discussed in small groups, with the continuous input by one of the lecturers in each group. As mentioned above, the participants then met again to share their findings with the whole plenum. This practical use of the theoretical input was particularly helpful. What became clear was that there were different ways to approach the same problem in different countries. It was very interesting, for example, to hear what the legal grounds for involuntary treatments were in the countries represented. This program was topped off with interactive opportunities to improve communication, presentation, and finally interview skills. As an introduction to the topic of interviewing skills one participant "interviewed" a mock patient suffering of both mental and physical disorder in front of the whole group.

At the end, all participants were awarded a diploma, going along with an emotional farewell between all the scholars and lecturers.

An aim for the future could be to review, in accordance with the objectives of the summer school, if and where former scholars were able to spread locally the knowledge they have gained. In the longer term former scholars could then also consider collecting a "tool kit" with materials used by them for teaching purposes to facilitate sharing knowledge.

### **Participants' feedback**

Overall, the 3rd EPA Summer School was a great success on a personal level reflected in the evaluation of the course by the participants. The great majority of scholars were more than satisfied with the Summer School as a whole, as well as with each of its organizational aspects. Most of the

participants highly appreciated that a lot of materials were provided in advance. According to the final evaluation, all the sessions/modules were considered rather excellent with a very small difference in grades. Highlighted as most valuable aspects of the Summer School were the opportunities to network, to meet colleagues, to share experiences, to have open discussions and a lot of interactive sessions. Scholars also pinpointed the chance for a close interaction not only with peers, but also with the lecturers as experts in the field, both during the regular sessions and during the social events. With care and consideration for the needs of the participants, the Summer School really allowed time and place for cultural exchange. Difference was not only accepted, it was encouraged. When asked what they would improve about the school, most participants appreciated the current format and just wanted it to last longer, or to have a second similar opportunity. "It was a great opportunity to be here! One time to participate is not enough; scholars who are interested should be invited again", a participant wrote in their feedback form.

## **Conclusion**

Those four days of the EPA Summer School in Strasbourg gave young psychiatrists from 18 countries an opportunity to learn about comorbidity between mental and physical disorders, but also to exchange on both professional and personal level in a multicultural environment. The highly structured program delivered by experienced educators and clinicians consisted of relevant topics, informative presentations, interesting cases, as well as interactive workshops and discussions. This combination put participants in a position to learn more about the key topics and to grasp complex information by interactive elements that were educational and fun at the same time. This ideal combination of learning in a multicultural and less formal environment has proven to be a great success as feedback analysis showed high level of participants' satisfaction and inspiration. In conclusion of the experience, there is a clear indication to screen patients with mental disorders for physical health issues and vice versa. Patients should be viewed in a more holistic way to promote patients' health and this program has encouraged young psychiatrists to do so in future. In addition to having successfully learned on a personal level, the scholars are returning to their countries with a mission to become multipliers.

In short, yes, we, the scholars agree that the 3<sup>rd</sup> EPA Summer School was successful and it was worth to participate in it.

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