

EPA GAINING EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME REPORT

On the observership visit at the “Newham Centre for Mental Health & Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, WHO Collaborating Centre for Mental Health Services Development, Queen Mary University of London (London, UK)”
Realised “from the 5th to the 16th of December 2016”
By “Paolo Ossola”

REPORT:

Introduction

I’m a Consultant in Adult Psychiatry and Junior Research Fellow at the University of Parma in Italy.

I’ve been lucky enough to have two supervisors highly qualified in both clinic and research. If as a clinical observer, I attended the Early Intervention service of City and Hackney (East London NHS Foundation Trust) with Dr Olivier Andlauer, Dr Nikolina Jovanovic introduced me to the Unit for Social and Community Psychiatry that, being a WHO Collaborating Centre for Mental Health Service Development, has really high standards of research methodology.

Before the beginning of the placement, both Dr. Andlauer and Dr. Jovanovic have been really flexible and helpful in planning these two weeks so that, considering the few time available, every moment was used at its best.

City and Hackney early Intervention service, East London NHS Foundation Trust

I wasn’t new to NHS as I did a similar attachment at another Early Intervention Service in London few years ago (Lambeth Early Onset at SLaM) but, as often happens in highly skilled and professional environment aimed at constant improvement, I appreciated several changes in only two years.

The Early Intervention Service in Hackney is a stand-alone service that receives referrals from different figures (e.g. police, social services, GPs, volunteering associations) and bases the treatment of First Episode of Psychosis on a bio-psycho-social approach with a care coordinator.

In the last months a couple of changes in the standards of care have been implemented into the service and this gave us the possibility to look a bit more in depth in how these changes affected the referrals characteristics. This was particularly relevant as Hackney has one of the highest incidence of psychosis in the UK. As I am writing, the results in form of an abstract have been submitted for a poster presentation to the EPA 2017 that will be held in Florence.

Equally interesting have been the discussion that followed my presentation on how Early Intervention Services work in Italy, and in Parma specifically. I found the team particularly interested on what changed recently in our Mental Health system (e.g. allocation of structured budget depending of patients’ needs and the closure of High Security Psychiatric Hospital in favour of smaller facilities more focused on rehabilitation and more integrated within the society).

On Wednesday the 7th I attended a Bart’s Academic Afternoon on the challenges and implications of a smoke-free psychiatric hospital. It has been fascinating to hear the report of those that already applied this direction and the worries and perplexities of those that are going to follow this rule in the next months. The whole afternoon was based on the fact that people who have a mental health illness have a 10-20 year reduced life expectancy and smoking is one of the main causes of this.

Academic Unit, WHO Collaborating Centre for Mental Health Service Development, QMUL

With Dr Jovanovic, I was able to spend time with various professionals and PhD students to get a clear understanding about various research projects carried out in this unit. The Unit for Social and Community Psychiatry is a designated World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre and it is the only one specifically for 'mental health services development' in the world. I attended presentations and meeting from PhD students and in several informal occasions, I received the valuable feedback of students and renowned supervisors such as Dr Giacco on my research projects.

Since one of the main aims of this program is to favour the exchange and translate it into clinical practice, I had the opportunity to visit the Newham Personality Disorder Service where Dr Jovanovic is an Associate Specialist Psychiatrist. There I benefited from both the clinicians' explanation of the service and the main psychological approaches adopted (e.g. DBT, MBT) and from the patients' perspectives on the treatments offered. This has been especially useful given the possibility of setting-up a service specialised in personality disorder in my hometown.

On Wednesday the 14th I attended a Newham Academic Afternoon that was mainly supervision-oriented. In this occasion young trainees had the opportunity to discuss their doubts both through Balint groups and clinical case presentations. It ended with a journal club session on the efficacy of antipsychotic medication in schizophrenia.

Moreover, being with such competent and skilled supervisors allowed me to participate to Network meetings involving the most distinguished experts in the field of FEP and Social and Community Psychiatry and to observe in first person how research plans are discussed and shaped.

Last but not least, I should thank the EPA administrative staff, Gary Wilson from the Human Recourses for his precious and prompt help with all the paperwork needed for the application and all the staff involved without whose kindness and competence this attachment wouldn't have been such a great experience.

My only regret is to have been there for only two weeks. I should admit that the temptation of moving to London and apply for a placement arose several times during my staying. I hope that I can still keep in contact with Dr Jovanovic and Dr Andlauer so that my current enthusiasm might be translated into a more grounded and long-lasting international collaboration. In the meantime, this report will shortly become a presentation to my colleagues in Parma to discuss possible improvements in the light of this experience.

Parma, 20th December 2016

Paolo Ossola

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