

Careers in psychiatric specialities

8. Psychotherapy

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Career prospects

The general prospects for consultant posts in psychotherapy are mixed. Despite frequent recommendations, it is not an area which is generally undergoing expansion and the development of posts varies across the country.

The Joint Planning and Advisory Committee (JPAC) recently recommended that three new specialist senior registrar posts in psychotherapy should be created. This means that there is currently manpower approval for 39 specialist senior registrar training posts in psychotherapy; six of these are reserved for part-time trainees and approximately 28 of the remaining posts are actually filled.

The future of psychotherapy within the NHS is unpredictable in view of the present trends encapsulated in the Government White Paper on the NHS. Some would suggest that with greater consumer choice that psychotherapy services will expand, but it is unclear, as yet, what priority psychotherapy will be given vis-à-vis acute general psychiatry and the other specialities.

Training requirements

The Royal College of Psychiatrists currently recommends at least four years of full-time training in psychotherapy at senior registrar level should be spent for a consultant psychotherapist post, and a minimum of two years of senior registrar training, specifically in psychotherapy, for a consultant post with special responsibility in psychotherapy. It has recently been recommended that consultant posts with a special interest in psychotherapy should be discontinued.

Despite these recommendations, very few senior registrar rotations offer the opportunity of two years full-time psychotherapy training, although many regions offer specialty four year training posts in psychotherapy. About one-third of these posts, however, are located in the London area, many of them having informal links with the London psycho-

analytic institutions. Opportunities for aspiring psychotherapists in the provinces are consequently somewhat limited.

Personal therapy is considered an essential requirement for a full-time consultant psychotherapist. This is occasionally provided on a reciprocal basis between adjacent districts within a particular region as part of training, but sometimes trainees must arrange and finance this themselves. Some regional health authorities will contribute to the cost of therapy for trainees in four year specialty senior registrar posts.

In addition to the senior registrar training slot, many psychotherapists may choose to undertake a training scheme in a particular form of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. There are a variety of different courses available nationally, providing different training and perspectives. Many of the psychoanalytically orientated courses are based in London, e.g. The Institute of Group Analysis and The Institute of Psychoanalysis, although The Institute of Human Relations in Scotland provides a comparable 'analytically orientated' training. In addition, many regions now have their own training schemes in psychodynamic psychotherapy. In view of the variety and complexity of training, one of the most important points to emphasise is that the individual trainee must seek careful advice about his/her personal training needs and interests.

Job structure

The job structure varies from post to post. Some consultants work primarily in a therapeutic community setting but the majority of posts involve day and out-patient work.

Consultant posts with special responsibility for psychotherapy may seem attractive, but in practice they are demanding and difficult jobs. The consultant has a general psychiatry work-load and in addition is expected to run a district psychotherapy service, often with minimal resources. In these jobs, the formal structure required to carry out effective psychotherapy is often disrupted by the demands of

the acute general psychiatry service. Some consultant posts are advertised on a part-time basis with the understanding that the successful applicant will spend a proportion of his/her time in private practice.

Most NHS full-time consultant psychotherapists spend about a quarter to one-third of their time in face to face contact with patients, and a similar amount of time providing supervision and teaching. The consultant often has a key role in setting-up or running psychotherapy training for medical and non-medical staff within the region or district. Managerial and administrative duties account for a significant part of a consultant's job. The work of a consultant psychotherapist within the NHS is, therefore, very different to that of a psychoanalyst in private practice.

Likely job satisfactions and frustrations

One of the main satisfactions is the opportunity to work in depth with individual patients, often those people other psychiatrists have found difficult to deal with. It is, however, well documented that the intensity of the work can lead to a feeling of burnout. At present the demand for psychotherapy greatly outstrips its availability, and this can demoralise the psychotherapist and bring him/her into conflict with certain colleagues who have unrealistic expectations of what a psychotherapy service can provide.

Most psychotherapists find the training and supervisory aspects of their job to be one of the most rewarding areas of work. As the medical leader of a multidisciplinary service, one may be the target of a certain amount of envy from non-medical colleagues who may be equally qualified in psychotherapy but do not receive the same rewards in terms of either status or finance.

Prospects for research

Funding for psychotherapy research is less forthcoming than for biological psychiatry, which anyway

receives additional financial assistance from the pharmaceutical industry. It is, however, encouraging that the first Professor of Psychotherapy has recently been appointed at the University of Warwick, and the MRC/ESRC Social and Applied Psychology Unit at Sheffield University has an international reputation for high quality, detailed and meticulous work. Opportunities for small-scale research projects do exist and there is an active UK branch of the Society for Psychotherapy Research (SPR) which provides a forum for intellectual exchange and encouragement. Audit is highly relevant to the field of psychotherapy and development of the means of evaluating and costing psychotherapy services will be one priority for researchers in the future.

Conclusions

Psychotherapy is a fascinating and absorbing speciality, but career prospects, at present, are unpredictable. The development of consultant posts is sporadic and the shortfall in senior registrar posts means that even when posts are advertised, there are relatively few suitably qualified trainees who can apply. Although most psychotherapists gain great satisfaction from the clinical component of their work, the demands of the service can be excessive and difficult to manage.

Suggested reading

- AVELINE, M. (1990) Developing a new NHS psychotherapy service and training scheme in the provinces. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 6, 312–323.
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