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UNDERGRADUATE ELECTIVE EXPERIENCE IN PSYCHIATRY - A PERSONAL ACCOUNT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

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Introduction: The study was triggered by the first author's own experience on an undergraduate elective at the National Mental Wellness Centre in St Lucia. This was an eye-opening experience of psychiatry in a less economically developed environment. It highlighted disparities between practice in the developed and the developing world. Notably significant differences were apparent in facilities, epidemiology of presenting complaints, the interaction of cultural beliefs as well as the method of assessment and management.

Aims/objectives: To review the literature on the educational impact of electives in psychiatry.

Methods: A literature search using Ovid MEDLINE was conducted using the keywords 'medical student' AND 'elective' AND 'psychiatry'. A total of 229 results were returned. These were then analysed for their relevance.

Results: Only one paper was found emphasising the importance of electives in psychiatry. This reported on one individual's personal experience. There also were reports highlighting the importance of undergraduate elective experience and the need to increase exposure to psychiatry to improve the uptake of postgraduate training programmes. There were no papers objectively assessing the educational quality or impact of a psychiatric elective experience.

Conclusions: An overseas elective experience was subjectively beneficial for the author but there is a lack of objective research to show the educational benefit of psychiatry electives on a wider scale. Further research regarding the educational benefits of electives in psychiatry is needed.