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Editorial

Prioritising the Mental Health of Psychiatric Trainees across Europe

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This first special issue of the International Journal of Psychiatric Trainees (previously named European Journal of Psychiatric Trainees) features four articles based on posters presented at the 31st Forum of the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees in Zurich. Focusing on mental health challenges faced by psychiatric trainees across Europe – including key themes such as burnout, depression, and the impact of patient suicide – this special issue highlights the need for systematic support programs, improved awareness and utilisation of mental health resources, and structural changes in medical education. By considering these matters, the Journal supports discussion and action towards improving the mental health of psychiatric trainees worldwide.

In July 2023, the delegations of national trainee associations from all over Europe met in Zurich, Switzerland for the 31st Forum of the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT). The Forum centred around the theme "Making Your Mental Health a Priority", highlighting the need to tackle common mental health challenges faced by psychiatric trainees across Europe.

Some of the posters presented during the Forum have been developed into the scholarly articles featured in this first special issue of the International Journal of Psychiatric Trainees, themed "Trainee Mental Health". The contributions to this special issue reflect the diverse array of challenges currently faced by psychiatric trainees in Europe. From the psychological burden of the COVID-19 pandemic that was experienced by healthcare professionals[1] to the profound impact of patient suicide on their professional and personal life, each article sheds light on critical issues that demand urgent attention.

MENTAL HEALTH OF PHYSICIANS IN GERMANY

The narrative mini-review by Erikas Vasiliauskas and Jördis Rausch focuses on the mental health challenges experienced by physicians in Germany, highlighting burnout and depression as major problems.[2] Their review underscores the pervasive nature of stress and mental health issues in medical practice and, given the lack of a systemic approach for trainees struggling with their mental health in Germany, calls for comprehensive support programs tailored to the unique needs of physicians.

ADDRESSING PSYCHOLOGICAL BURDEN AMONG PSYCHIATRIC TRAINEES IN SWITZERLAND

Filippo Toni and his colleagues present an education and training-focused article examining the mental health challenges faced by psychiatric trainees in Switzerland.[3] Their survey revealed high rates of mental distress among trainees, coupled with low awareness and utilisation of support services like ReMed. The authors advocate for a dual approach: promoting individual self-care strategies and implementing organisational changes to facilitate greater access to mental health resources.

IMPACT OF PATIENT SUICIDE ON TRAINEES AND EARLY-CAREER PSYCHIATRISTS IN ITALY

With their qualitative analysis, Giulio Longo and the Italian delegation for the EFPT forum focus on the emotional aftermath of patient suicide on psychiatric trainees and early-career psychiatrists in Italy.[4] Their findings highlight profound emotional responses such as sadness, guilt, and frustration, underscoring the need for more structured support strategies and interventions to help trainees cope with these challenging experiences.

COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS IN PORTUGAL: A TRAINEE PERSPECTIVE

Vítor Hugo Jesus Santos and colleagues offer a viewpoint on community-based mental health interventions in Portugal, discussing the impact of cultural and social factors on psychiatric care.[5] This reflection on their National Mental Health Program underscores the evolving landscape of mental health services in Portugal and the role of psychiatric trainees in shaping and implementing these crucial reforms.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This issue, marking the first special issue of the International Journal of Psychiatric Trainees, focuses on the critical topic of "Trainee Mental Health" that is receiving increased recognition worldwide. The articles compiled in this special issue together emphasise several key themes that are crucial for advancing discourse and action concerning psychiatric trainees and mental health professionals across Europe. Across different contexts, psychiatric trainees and early-career psychiatrists face significant mental health challenges exacerbated by workload, stigma, and the emotional demands of clinical practice.[6]

There is a pressing need to improve awareness and utilisation of mental health support services among trainees. Addressing stigma and promoting a culture of openness and support are essential steps towards enhancing mental health outcomes. In this regard, the training environment itself plays a critical role. Supportive and inclusive training programs can mitigate stress and foster resilience among future psychiatrists, while at a higher level systemic change is advocated.[7,8] National, European and global policies must prioritise mental health support for healthcare professionals, and initiatives that integrate mental health and preventive strategies into medical education and training curricula are much needed.

MOVING FORWARD

As we reflect on the insights shared in this special issue, it is clear that, while progress has been made in recognising mental health issues among psychiatric trainees, much work remains to be done. Efforts to destigmatise mental health discussions, enhance access to support services, and advocate for deep structural changes in medical education and healthcare systems are paramount.

Future research should continue to explore innovative approaches to supporting the mental health of trainees, including longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of intervention programs and comparative analyses across different healthcare systems. Collaboration between international organisations, such as the EFPT itself, and national psychiatric trainee associations will be crucial in driving these initiatives forward.

By prioritising mental health and fostering supportive environments, the next generation of psychiatrists can be empowered to thrive personally and professionally, ultimately enhancing psychiatric care and advancing the field as a whole.

As Editors, we are proud to present the now more encompassing scope of the journal under the name International Journal of Psychiatric Trainees with this collection of articles. We invite ongoing dialogue and encourage all stakeholders to engage in further action towards improving mental health outcomes for psychiatric trainees worldwide.[9]

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