

## Promoting Psychiatry as a promising medical specialty for medical students

With an increasing incidence & prevalence of mental health problems, the need for having well-resourced manpower has been acknowledged all over the globe. The role of psychiatrists in reducing the burden of mental disorders is well established. This role ranges from being clinicians and mental health experts within multidisciplinary teams to teachers, researchers, public mental health specialists and advocates for the mentally ill. It is a pity that despite the importance of this focus, the worldwide data still show that the median distribution of psychiatrists per 100 000 population in the world is 1.2 with a variance of 0.04/100 000 population in Africa to 9.8/100 000 population in Europe. Resources are especially scarce in low and middle income countries and wherever resources are available are distributed unequally.

While emphasizing psychiatrist's multiple roles, various reports from WPA and WHO recommend comprehensive training for medical professionals in the entire field of mental health. Looking at the ground reality, it is evident that even with a pressing need for having increased number of psychiatrists we will never be able to get the desired number in the near future. Therefore we need to explore other options to develop expertise in this speciality like promoting more awareness and exposure about mental health and its impact on wellbeing among non-psychiatrists. Teaching & training of psychiatry would therefore assume a paramount importance at all levels of medical education but more importantly at undergraduate level to ensure the future doctors are well versed with this recognition, assessment and early interventions for common mental health problems.

Although the issue of undergraduate psychiatric education remains very important, it is worth noting that the information on teaching of psychiatry in medical schools, availability of mental health resources & basic information on psychiatric training remains deficient in many countries. The availability of teaching & training, even if present, also varies and leads to huge disparity in the quality of training across countries and even within countries. It is a pity that reports of student and teachers attitudes to mental health show several negative and adverse views about teaching of undergraduate psychiatry and its inclusion in curriculum. While these limitations increase many problems in learning skills and knowledge of medical students, there is also a strong negative effect on future recruitment in psychiatry and choice of psychiatry as a speciality for their future medical career.

WPA, being a represented organisation of psychiatrists, is continuously raising the profile of undergraduate teaching of psychiatry and has been advocating inclusion of subject of psychiatry in undergraduate medical curriculum. This exposure is not only needed to improve the medical care of our patients but also to help for future recruitment in psychiatry. As doctors manage a number of patients with mental health problems in almost all specialities, it becomes imperative that all doctors should be able to recognize and initiate treatment of mental disorders and co-morbid psychiatric disorders even at non psychiatric settings. This can be achieved by including the subject of psychiatry at the undergraduate curriculum & to stimulate students to learn more about psychiatry to de-stigmatise the speciality by their active engagement in learning about mental health & mental disorders during their medical school periods.

Based on these observations, World Psychiatric Association has outlined a series of actions to promote psychiatry at undergraduate medical curriculum and also to support & campaign for recruitment in psychiatry. **WPA's executive committee has appointed a committee (chaired & co-chaired by Prof Dinesh Bhugra & Dr Afzal Javed) to formulate some recommendations and proposed action plan with the following remit.**

- To prepare a WPA statement on "Promoting psychiatry as an inspiring medical speciality and introducing psychiatry as a prospective future career for medical students"
- To set up different programmes for promotion of Psychiatry at the undergraduate medical education & exploring innovative ways of engaging medical students in psychiatry and developing their interest in the speciality.
- To prepare general educational material for medical students introducing psychiatry as an essential medical discipline
- To prepare an outline of list(s) of the topics that need to be incorporated in the undergraduate curriculum

### **Proposed plan of action**

- To achieve the above mentioned objectives WPA would establish small groups to take up different projects.
- WPA scientific sections, Zonal representatives and member societies will be approached for their representation in these groups.
- Each group will meet electronically and produce statements / materials during 2016 and it is hoped that these will be ready for launch by the beginning of 2017.

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Institutional programme on the core training curriculum for Psychiatry

WPA, Yokohama, Japan