

# GLOBAL STRATEGIES TARGETING THE RECRUITMENT CRISIS IN PSYCHIATRY: THE DOCTORS ACADEMY FUTURE EXCELLENCE INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL SUMMER SCHOOL

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## SUMMARY

**Background:** The World Health Organization has identified a chronic shortage of psychiatrists worldwide whereas the demand for mental health services is on the rise. Indeed mental health problems are projected to be a leading cause of morbidity by 2020 according to the Global Burden of Disease study. Bhugra et al, under the auspices of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the World Psychiatry Association, spearheaded an international study across 22 countries and identified myriad factors that can influence career choices at pre-medical school, medical school and postgraduate levels. The enthusiasm and passion of mental health educators and the quality of psychiatry placements were identified as factors that can attract medical and students and graduates to a career in psychiatry. The Future Excellence International Medical Summer School (FEIMSS) is a 5-day event for medical students held yearly in Manchester, UK. FEIMSS is the largest event of its kind in the world; the 2013 cohort was comprised of 244 students from 40 countries representing 80 universities.

**Aims:** To improve the image of psychiatrists and the perception of psychiatry in general with 2 brief contact-based lectures from a consultant and an early-career psychiatrist. The lectures incorporated references to the humanities (literature, poetry, history, film, drama and art).

**Methods:** A mixed-methods study was conducted. Paper evaluation forms were hand-distributed to participants who attended the psychiatry talks. Items to constructs relevant to the talks were on a Likert-type scale. Participants were given the choice of anonymity. There was space for free-text comments which were subjected to thematic analyses.

**Results:** 25/25 of the participants responded (response rate 100%). The heterogeneous sample was comprised of participants representing 11 countries from Japan to Kosovo. The written feedback was exceptionally positive. For the, 'The psychiatry talks were interesting' and, 'Attending FEIMSS improved my understanding and respect for other cultures' constructs, 23/25 (92%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

**Discussion:** Notwithstanding the limitations of our evaluation - which to our knowledge is the first of its kind on such an ethnically eclectic sample - our results suggest that a brief contact-based intervention incorporating the humanities may positively influence the perceptions of psychiatry and psychiatrists that medical students from diverse cultural backgrounds have. We contend that FEIMSS provides a platform to recruit medical students into psychiatry from all over the world and enables them to develop cultural competency.

**Key words:** psychiatry – recruitment - public perceptions of psychiatry - image of psychiatrists - humanities

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## INTRODUCTION

Career choices are influenced by a number of factors, including abilities, opportunities, and also resources. There comes a time in a person's life when one must decide what kind of career he or she wants to pursue. This is an enormous decision to make and must not be taken lightly. There are myriad factors that can influence one's decision making. Professor Dinesh Bhugra spearheaded an international study across 22 countries under the auspices of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) and the World Psychiatry Association (WPA). Bhugra et al analysed factors at pre-medical school, medical school and postgraduate levels that deterred or attracted graduates to consider psychiatry as a career. They concluded that, among other factors, enthusiastic educators and role models, hands-on clinical experience, active involvement in patient care and an interest in humanities and arts contributed to attracting graduates into psychiatry (Farooq 2014).

This paper will provide a brief overview of the role that the humanities can play in mental health education and improving the perception of psychiatry and the image of psychiatrists. Our paper also includes a succinct description of the Doctors Academy Future Excellence International Medical Summer School (FEIMSS). It also contains an analysis and discussion of the data derived from an evaluation study conducted on participants who attended the FEIMSS psychiatry lectures and a conclusion section.

In order to place our evaluation into context, we will discuss and describe recruitment strategies into psychiatry at a global level.

## RECRUITMENT INTO PSYCHIATRY

The worldwide picture in terms of recruitment into psychiatry is heavily influenced by the wealthier countries' ability to recruit to shortage specialties from International Medical Graduates (IMGs) (WHO:

"mhGAP: Mental Health Gap Action Programme: scaling up care for mental, neurological and substance use disorders", 2008; from [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/mhgap\\_final\\_english.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/mhgap_final_english.pdf)). Goldacre et al. found that IMGs from black minority ethnic (BME) groups were significantly overrepresented in general adult psychiatry, learning disability, and old age psychiatry (Goldacre 2009). Fazel and Ebmeier looked at UK centralized recruitment data and noted that for UK graduates psychiatry was the sixth most popular choice, whereas it was the fourth most popular choice for IMGs (Fazel 2009).

The first seminal review on recruitment was conducted by Eagle and Marcos. The authors described two distinct groups of people who opt for a career in psychiatry. The first group is composed of people who decided that they wanted to specialize in psychiatry before starting medical school. The second (larger) group is composed of people who decide that they want to specialize in psychiatry during medical school or after they qualify. Eagle and Marcos broadly describe the latter as having a "general practitioner, humanitarian orientation," with the potential of being pulled towards either primary care or psychiatry depending on economic and social factors. Eagle and Marcos also identified the characteristics of people who chose psychiatry as a career (Eagle 1980) (see Table 1).

## WHY MEDICAL STUDENTS CHOOSE PSYCHIATRY? THE 20 COUNTRY CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY

The WPA included recruitment to psychiatry as a major part of its 2008-2011 Action Plan (Maj 2008). The percentage of medical students who select psychiatry as a career varies from country to country however in general around 3% of students overall end up specializing in psychiatry (Wilkinson 1983), and those with positive attitudes towards mental health were around three times more likely to do so (El-Syeh 2006). It is useful to understand what factors play a role

especially across nations as doctors are global citizens and likely to move around more frequently.

Farooq et al. conducted a multi-national cross-sectional survey on why medical students choose psychiatry as a career. Farooq et al. developed an online questionnaire which included questions on demographics, influences in choosing medicine, pre-medical school qualifications, pre-medical school career choice, and quality of teaching, clinical exposure, enrichment activities, and reported clinical placement responsibility during medical school. A total of 2198 students from 46 medical schools in 20 countries consented to participating in the survey. The number of responses per country ranged from 9 (Tanzania) to over 300 (Germany) (Farooq 2014).

The primary analysis of this study examined the likelihood of participants specialising in psychiatry. The overall results suggested that 4.5% of respondents were "definitely" considering specialising in psychiatry, and another 15% were "seriously considering" specialising in the field, giving a combined "likely" total of 19%. Interestingly there was a higher likelihood of choosing psychiatry in the European countries, with a lower likelihood in African countries. No students in Tanzania (although based on small numbers) and only 1% in Uganda were likely to choose psychiatry. By comparison, up to 31% of students sampled in Chile and 33% in Iraq were likely future psychiatrists (Farooq 2014)

Overall, Farooq et al's findings are encouraging in that internationally there is a pool of 15% of students who would seriously consider psychiatry as a career. It is this group that is arguably the most critical to target at medical school in order to enhance recruitment. Our study has shown that there are specific aspects of undergraduate education that are associated with final year medical students choosing a career in psychiatry. Countries with lower rates of recruitment might look to their opposites to consider policy changes to improve local recruitment. Further studies are also needed in different countries to confirm prospectively specific national factors affecting recruitment to psychiatry (Farooq 2014).

**Table 1.** Eagle and Marcos' characteristics of students choosing psychiatry as a career (Eagle et al. 1980)

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- Are more likely to be single.
  - Are from large metropolitan areas.
  - Are politically liberal.
  - Are uninterested in religion.
  - Are interested in humanitarian ideas.
  - Are more likely to have majored in arts, humanities and social sciences before medical school.
  - Have low scores on measures of authoritarianism and self-esteem.
  - Have a high capacity to tolerate ambiguity.
  - Have high scores on anxiety and fear of death.
  - Have expressed positive attitudes to psychiatry and psychiatrists.
  - Have gained exposure to, and taken responsibility for, psychiatric patients, especially those with a good prognosis.
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## THE HEALTH HUMANITIES

There is a growing perception that science alone provides overall insufficient foundation for the holistic understanding of the interaction between health, illness and disease (Hurwitz 2009). The health humanities has emerged as a distinct entity in an attempt to ameliorate the limitations in the provision of health care service and can broadly be described as the application of art and literature to medicine (Oyebode 2009).

The study of the portrayal of mental illness in film also falls under the wide-ranging remit of the Health Humanities. Movies can provide viewers with a precious qualitative insight into the minds of people with mental illness so that we may “*Slip into their shoes and walk around in them.*” By virtue of cinema, we can learn more about what mental illness is like from the inside, and this, in turn, can help us to have a better understanding of what it is like to have a psychiatric disorder (Hankir 2012).

One could argue that as long as human beings continue to seek entertainment and escapism, for as the 20<sup>th</sup> century Noble Laureate T.S. Elliot said, ‘*Mankind cannot bear very much reality*’; cinema will remain deeply embedded in our societies.

The storylines of films are influenced by the societies we live in. Given that 1 in 4 of us has a mental illness at some point in our lives (WHO: “mhGAP: Mental Health Gap Action Programme: scaling up care for mental, neurological and substance use disorders”, 2008; from [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/mhgap\\_final\\_english.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/mhgap_final_english.pdf)), mental illness and the psychiatrists who treat these illnesses play huge roles in our societies and on our screens. An IMG might, for example, benefit from watching films produced in Hollywood with a mental health theme if they wanted to, for example, learn more about the general public in the United States of America and their understanding and perceptions of psychiatric disorders.

An example of a Hollywood production film that portrays the impact that mental illness has on people living in the United States of America would be the 1994 motion picture *When a Man loves a Woman* starring Andy Garcia (who plays the character of Michael Green, an airline pilot) and Meg Ryan (who plays the character of Alice, a school counsellor) directed by Luis Mandoki. *When a Man loves a Woman* tells the story of Michael and Alice who are a married couple ostensibly living a wonderful life with their daughters in San Francisco until the truth about Alice’s alcohol dependence reveals itself threatening to destroy the marriage and the lives of their children. What is especially interesting about the film is that it is actually based on the real life experiences of one of the two scriptwriters Al Franken, who is now a United States Senator. Al Franken’s wife struggled with alcohol

dependency whilst their two children were young and this placed a tremendous strain on their marriage as well as on the upbringing of their children. The fact that the storyline of *When a Man loves a Woman* was inspired by true-life events lends the film more veracity and authenticity in its portrayal of the devastating effects that alcohol dependence can have on the family unit (Almeida 2009).

Literature also has merit as an educational tool in the teaching of psychiatry related topics to undergraduate students and postgraduate trainees (Oyebode 2009). There are certain texts that can aptly illustrate the explanatory models a cultural group formulates. For example, the American physician and writer Khaled Hosseini’s novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* focuses on the tumultuous lives of Mariam and Laila, two Afghan women. While Mariam is a teenager, she witnesses her mother having a seizure and believes the cause of this to be religious, that is, her mother being possessed and persecuted by a malevolent entity (the Islamic belief of *Jinn* possession), as opposed to “medical,” that is, a disturbance in the electrical activity of the brain such as epilepsy.

Although the novel is a fictional account, it does have relevance to clinical psychiatry. The explanatory models that a cultural group formulates can influence why they may, for instance, consult a faith healer as opposed to a general practitioner and hence not receive the benefits of early intervention. If, however, an immigrant from Pakistan does make it to, for example, an outpatient clinic in the Royal Bolton Hospital in England, attributing psychological phenomena to *Jinn* possession, this patient should not be considered delusional because the belief they have presented with would be consistent with the cultural norm of countries in that region of the world. This example both illustrates the importance of developing a cultural competence in psychiatry and also how literature and art can be used as educational tools in undergraduate and post-graduate teaching.

## THE DOCTORS ACADEMY FUTURE EXCELLENCE INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL SUMMER SCHOOL (FEIMSS)

The Doctors Academy Future Excellence International Medical Summer School (FEIMSS) is a 5-day event for medical students held yearly in Manchester, UK. FEIMSS is the largest event of its kind in the world; the 2013 cohort was comprised of 240 students from over 40 countries representing 80 universities (see figure 1). FEIMSS offers a wide-ranging programme that includes streamed lectures from consultants across the different specialties and practical skills workshops (i.e. electrocardiograph interpretation and Basic Life Support).



**Figure 1.** Participants who attended the 2013 Doctors Academy Future Excellence International Medical Summer School, Manchester University Place, Manchester, England

## EVALUATION OF THE PSYCHIATRY LECTURES IN THE 2013 DOCTORS ACADEMY FEIMSS

### Aims

We aimed to improve the image of psychiatrists and the perception of psychiatry in general with 2 brief contact-based lectures from a consultant and an early-career psychiatrist. The lectures incorporated references to the humanities (literature, poetry, history, film, drama and art). I decided to take on the challenge of giving a psychiatry lecture despite only being an Early-Career Psychiatrist. I also enlisted a colleague and a good friend of mine, Dr Rashid Zaman who is a Consultant Psychiatrist and Honorary Fellow in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge in England. Dr Zaman's reputation of being an eloquent and effective orator did precede him. He has also travelled to many different countries and fosters a fascination towards other cultures, is erudite and is very well versed in diverse branches of the humanities. I felt he would be the perfect person to give a psychiatry lecture to such a heterogeneous audience.

Together Dr Zaman and I designed and developed the lectures. We each had one hour to educate and entice the participants. We didn't want to espouse a soporific talk lest the students succumb to slumber. We also didn't want our audience to feel that it was an onus to attend our lectures. We saw this as an opportunity to transform the image of the psychiatrist and to raise the profile of psychiatry by incorporating references to film, history, literature and poetry into our talks. We wanted to infuse dynamism to galvanise the participants and to make them realize that psychiatry isn't boring at all but rather the best career option that one could choose. Granted our expectations were high but so too were our standards.

### Methodology

We utilized a mixed-methodology approach in our study. In order to increase the response rate, we hand distributed paper evaluation forms to participants who attended the psychiatry talks. Items to constructs relevant to the talks were on a Likert-type scale. The items were as follows:

- Strongly disagree;
- Disagree;
- Neither agree nor disagree;
- Agree;
- Strongly agree.

Participants were given the choice of anonymity. There was also space for free-text comments which were subjected to thematic analyses.

### Results

25/25 of the participants responded (response rate 100%). The heterogeneous sample was comprised of participants representing 11 countries from Japan to Kosovo. The written feedback was exceptionally positive. For the, *'The psychiatry talks were interesting'* (Figure 2) and, *'Attending FEIMMS improved my understanding and respect for other cultures'* constructs, 23/25 (92%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 3, Figure 4).

Free text comments across the different cultures were also exceptionally positive:

*"I totally enjoyed the lectures they were super inspiring, good job!"*

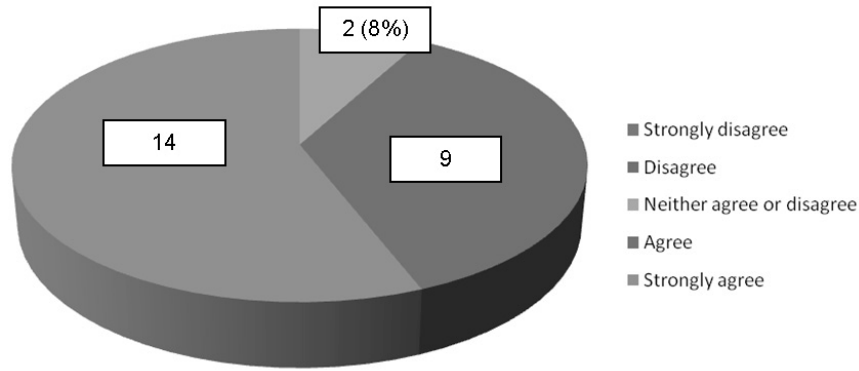
Medical Student, Kosovo

*"The talk was very helpful for me to understand psychiatry and psychiatric conditions."*

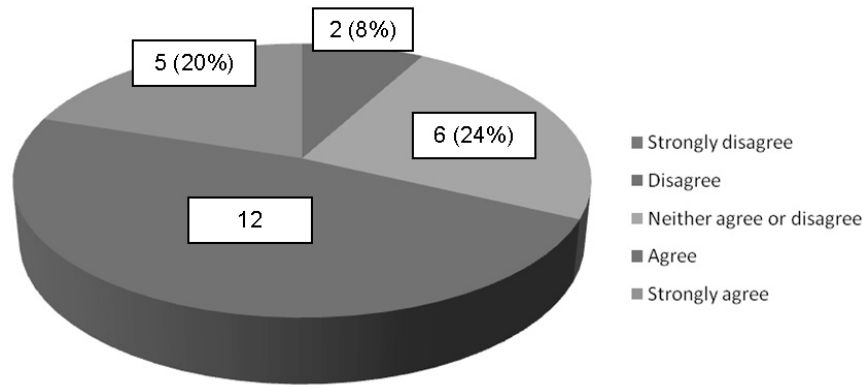
Medical Student, Japan

*"Great psychiatry lectures, inspiring and would have liked to hear more from both speakers."*

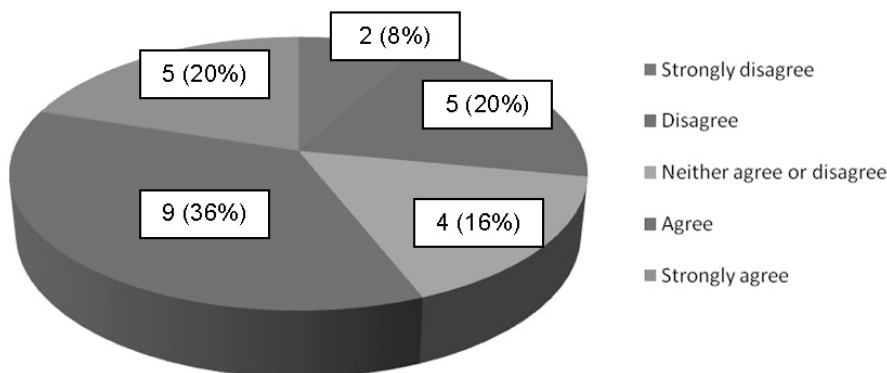
Medical Student, England



**Figure 2.** The talks on psychiatry were interesting (n=25)



**Figure 3.** The portrayal of psychiatry in film and literature influences my perception of psychiatry and psychiatrists (n=25)



**Figure 4.** The talks influenced me to consider psychiatry as an attractive career option (n=25)

*“Both were very inspiring and charismatic guys! Overall excellent and made me more inclined towards psychiatry than I was before and proved to me that psychiatrists are not the boring stereotype! Dr Hankir, Dr Zaman – Excellent”*

Medical student, Czech Republic

## DISCUSSION

Notwithstanding the limitations of our study - which to our knowledge is the first of its kind on such an ethnically eclectic sample - i.e. small sample size, lack of follow-up or control group, our results suggest that a

brief contact-based intervention incorporating the humanities can have a positive influence on the perceptions of psychiatry and psychiatrists that medical students from diverse cultural backgrounds have.

We contend that FEIMSS provides a platform to recruit medical students into psychiatry from all over the world and enables them to develop cultural competency.

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**Conflict of interest:** None to declare.

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