

Survey of Research Activity by Trainees in the Mersey Region

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The Royal College of Psychiatrists has always been keen to promote research by psychiatric trainees. Trainees are becoming increasingly aware of the need to produce research in order to enhance their promotion prospects and to widen their own knowledge and experience. At the University Department of Psychiatry in Liverpool we have taken an active role in its promotion within the region and in the spring of 1986 we decided to conduct a survey into research activity by psychiatric trainees in Mersey Region.

We surveyed all psychiatric training posts in the region except those which were an integral part of GP vocational training schemes and those which were vacant or occupied by locums. This left a total of 98 posts. We received 66 replies, giving an overall response rate of 67%; these comprised 36 out of 44 (82%) from the University Linked General Professional Training Scheme, and 17 out of 19 (89%) from the senior registrar (SR) group, but only 13 out of 35 (37%) from the other general professional rotations.

For the purpose of this analysis we considered the three groups separately. The University rotation gave replies from 36 trainees; 20 of these (10 male, 10 female) were in first and second year posts, whilst 16 (9 male, 7 female) were in third and fourth year posts. An interest in research was expressed by 33 (92%) whilst 10 (28%) were actually doing it (2 from first and second year and 8 from 3rd and 4th year). One other had started a project but then given up.

The Senior Registrar Group (13 male, 4 female) showed a response indicating that all 17 (100%) were interested in research whilst 15 (88%) were doing research; 4 reported difficulties in undertaking research in the past due to inadequate supervision or resources but all of these were currently engaged in research.

Of the 13 (15%) trainees (10 male, 3 female) from peripheral rotations two were currently engaged in research whilst one other had previously attempted a project but had given it up. An interest in research was expressed by 12 (92%).

Looking at the figures in a slightly different way, 18 of the 21 post membership trainees were doing research (86%) whilst 9 of the 46 (20%) pre-membership trainees were involved. All the 27 trainees doing research had supervision but only 17 felt that they had access to adequate statistical advice. Only 10 trainees reported attendance at the University Research Seminars (5 from the University rotation and 5 from the SR Group) and of these 9 were engaged in research.

Of those doing research, 8 were involved in their own projects, 12 in joint projects and 7 in both types of project. Only 6 out of the 66 (9%) were registered for higher

degrees. 11 (17%) had published work whilst 13 (20%) had presented papers at meetings.

The 27 trainees doing research listed 37 replies to a question on nature of the research interest. The three most common were social and community (32%), psychological/psychotherapy (27%) and physiological (19%). The trainees were given a choice of five groups with which they could discuss a proposal if wishing to undertake research, i.e. tutor, consultant, senior registrar, university department or other. The 27 currently doing research gave the following response, 36% would go to the University Department, 28% to their consultant, 22% to their tutor, 10% to other and 3% to an SR. Amongst the 39 not doing research, 34% would go to their Consultant, 25% to their Tutor, 22% to the University Department, 6% to an SR, 4% to other and 7% did not know.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has also been keen to encourage more people to take the research option in the membership exam. We therefore also asked about the trainees views on the research option.

There were 21 post-membership trainees and none of these had done the research option, although 7 (33%) felt that some form of research option should be available. The 46 pre-membership trainees showed that 11 (24%) had or were considering the research option whilst 20 of the 46 (43%) felt that some form of research option should be present.

Comment

The response rate should make this a more representative sample especially of the SR group and the University rotation, than the one conducted in Southern Division in 1980.¹ A direct comparison between the two surveys is therefore not possible but it is interesting to look at some of the trends. Overall in the Mersey sample 92.5% of replies expressed an interest in research which is very similar to the 93% found in Southern Division.

Of the replies, 28% from the University rotation and 15% of those from the peripheral rotations showed that trainees were currently involved in research which is less than the 44% reported in the earlier survey; 88% of senior registrars were involved in research which is slightly higher than the Southern Division reply. In fact the two SRs who did not reply are both known to be engaged in research, giving a true figure of 89% for SRs involved in research currently. It would seem unlikely that many of the general professional trainees who did not reply are currently involved in research.

The number registered for higher degrees 6 (9%) is much

lower but this possibly reflects the fact that registration for MPsyMed at Liverpool is currently not done until the membership exam has been passed. The regulations for this degree are currently under revision.

Of the 27 (63%) doing research, 17 felt that they had access to adequate statistical advice. This is somewhat disappointing as the University Department of Psychiatry has a keen lecturer in psychological statistics. A possibly related issue is that only 10 of the 67 (15%) attend the university research seminars. These are held in the evening during term time and take the form of a presentation of a research project with keen discussion and with at least one clinical member of the University Departments and the Lecturer in psychological statistics attending. These seminars are in addition to ongoing supervision and to the teaching of research methodology on the University postgraduate courses.

It is clear from the figures that, whilst the University Department is seen by trainees as having a significant role to play in helping with their research, they predominantly seek the help and advice of their tutor and consultant. This is particularly true of those not doing research where 59% would approach the tutor or consultant if they wished to discuss undertaking a research project. This shows the need for consultants to be willing to encourage any research interests amongst their trainees and indeed in Mersey Region many consultants are already well known for this. These results also show the need for good communication between consultants and the university departments. The University Department of Psychiatry in Liverpool has

increased its efforts to disseminate knowledge of our facilities and this appears to be having some impact.

The replies on the question of a research option showed that 43% of pre-membership and 33% of post-membership trainees felt that it was a good idea in principle, but in fact no one has yet done it in Mersey Region. Amongst those who expressed an interest in the research option the main reasons for not doing it were the long advance timing required and the fact that the uncertainty and amount of effort required were not commensurate with the possible rewards when it came to sitting the exam. It should, of course, not be overlooked that a majority (60% overall) were not in favour of having a research option at all.

In summary there is evidence that a large number of trainees do wish to do research and overall 40% were currently involved in research. In contrast to the findings published last year for Southern Division there does appear to be less research activity amongst junior trainees in peripheral rotations in Mersey Region. Most trainees wishing to start research will approach their local consultants first and it would appear that these consultants have the key role in fostering research either by direct supervision or by being able to direct the trainee where to seek further help and advice.

REFERENCE

- ¹HOLLYMAN, J. A. & ABOU-SALEH, M. T. (1985). Trainees and research. *Bulletin of the Royal College of Psychiatrists*, 9, 203-204.

Therapeutic Communication with Children

Applications are invited for the above part-time course to be held on Monday afternoons 2.00 to 5.00 p.m. during the Autumn Term 1987 and the Spring Term 1988.

The course aims to increase understanding of children's communications and of the therapeutic process. It is intended to provide a psychodynamic background for those who have had no formal training in psychoanalytic psychotherapy with children. The course is open to members of professions involved in child guidance, departments of

child psychiatry and related fields, who are already engaged in individual work with children and who are willing to contribute current clinical material.

Further information and application form available from: The Training Administrator, The Tavistock Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA (telephone 01 435 7111, extension 313 or 469).

A general prospectus of training is available upon request.

The Role of the Psychiatrist in Psychiatric Service Planning

The Social and Community Psychiatry Section Executive Committee of the College are considering problems arising from management decisions on the development of psychiatric services which were made without adequate consultation.

The Committee would welcome colleagues' comments on the role of the psychiatrist in psychiatric service planning.

All such comments should be addressed to the Secretary, Dr D. G. Fowlie, Kingseat Hospital, Newmachar, Aberdeenshire AB5 0NH.