

Report from the Congress: Future of Psychiatry and Psychiatric Training – 19th European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees Forum in Prague

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After a long period of preparation, Prague became for the first time host city of the forum of the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT). This event, which attracted almost 100 trainees from more than 30 countries in Europe, was significant for several reasons. In the history of the EFPT, this was the biggest forum in terms of number of participants and number of national associations participating (for the first time also representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan took part). For the first time the EFPT General Assembly was held in the forum, with EFPT now officially registered as a non-profit nongovernmental organization based in Brussels. For the Czech section of young psychiatrists then this action represented the greatest challenge in its history. The importance of this event was emphasized by the patronage of the Mayor of the city of Prague, Mr. Bohuslav Svoboda and the dean of the First Faculty of Medicine at the Charles University, Professor Tomáš Zima.

Topics which are of great importance to trainees have been discussed for five days in various formats (plenary lectures, workshops, discussions, etc.). The central theme was “Future of psychiatric training in Europe”. This attractive theme was chosen deliberately, because as shown by recent findings of surveys, labour mobility, “brain drain” effect (Nawka et al., 2010a) and numerous significant changes in the concept of post-graduate training (initiations of “competency based” programs) (Oakley et al., 2008) pose considerable challenges to psychiatry.

EFPT organization, which last year reached an imaginary border of adulthood, is the longest functioning as well as the most influential group of psychiatric trainees. Its history began in 1993, when a group of young psychiatrists met in Utrecht in the Netherlands to jointly discuss the differences in psychiatric training. Since then, the organization has grown and over the years has become a reliable and influential player who is trying to carry through its principles in close cooperation with other international organizations such as the Union of European Medical Specialists (UEMS), the European Psychiatric Association (EPA), the Early Career Psychiatrists Committee (ECPC) and World Psychiatric Association (WPA). EFPT considers harmonization of postgraduate studies in psychiatry and helping organizations of uniting trainees in various European countries as its supreme goal. The ideological mission of the organization is the assumption that improving postgraduate training of psychiatrists using constant exchange of views and experiences, will ultimately improve the care of the patient (Nawka et al., 2010b).

The Forum has a relatively stable annual structure consisting of both the scientific and the social program. Before the forum participants had the opportunity to find out more about the local system of psychiatric care by visiting several units at the Department of Psychiatry, First Faculty of Medicine. The official opening of the forum was held at the Park Inn hotel where the president of EFPT, Dr. Alexander Nawka and all the other EFPT officers welcomed the delegates. Presentations were in general devoted to the structure, history and key objectives of the organization. As a pioneering activity, for the first time the “European Award for Excellence in Psychiatry” was awarded. An expert jury has chosen from the six proposed projects

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of young psychiatrists the one led by the Dr. Elodie del Valle from France. The French group has prepared and distributed information booklet “The psychiatry trainees welcome booklet: Everything you always wanted to know about psychiatric training, but did not know where to ask”. This publication has become an excellent guide which facilitates the orientation in French psychiatry, especially for young psychiatrists and trainees.

The program continued with so called “country reports round”, where delegates referred on the activities of national trainee organizations and the problems they are facing. For example very positive reaction triggered report from Dr. Rosa Molina from Spain, who reported on the “visitation” of the UEMS committee, led by Dr. James Strachan (president of UEMS Board of Psychiatry) at the local clinic. This is an external audit by UEMS Board of Psychiatry which aims to compare the local conditions and implementation of psychiatric training on the level where it is implemented in the practice (Lotz-Rambaldi et al., 2008). EFPT supports such activities and encourages other trainee organizations to initiate these external audits, which might lead through highly professional feedback to the improvement of the training. Dr. Fidan Mammadova on the other hand reported about very unflattering situation in Azerbaijan, where in recent years training in psychiatry has been de facto deliberately reduced by the authorities to an insufficient level.

Next day, so-called academic day, was held in the “Blue auditorium” in Carolinum in the historical centre of Prague. Distinguished speakers from several countries participated in the lectures with the theme “The future of psychiatry/psychiatric training”. On behalf of the dean of the First Faculty of Medicine, Professor Tomáš Hanuš cordially welcomed the EFPT delegates on the soil of the Charles University. Professor Jiří Raboch in his lecture “The past, present and future of psychiatry in the Czech Republic”, as the name implies discussed the context in which the Czech psychiatry developed and introduced it in the context of modern psychiatry. He mentioned that the Czech Psychiatric Association is one of the oldest Czech medical societies, founded in the year 1919 after the formation of the independent Czechoslovakia as Purkyne Society for the Study of Soul and Nerves. He furthermore pointed out, that less than 3.9% of the health care budget has been allocated into mental health care, leaving Czech Republic almost at the end of the imaginary ranking of European countries. Nonetheless Czech psychiatrists are very active on the international level especially in hosting various major international congresses (e.g. World Psychiatric Congress in 2008 and planned International Congress of World Psychiatric Association in 2012).

In one of the key lectures “Are psychiatrists an endangered species?” Professor Heinz Katschnig from Vienna presented six major challenges our profession is facing. Challenges from inside the profession would in his perspective entail: questioned validity of psychiatry’s diagnostic definitions and classification systems; waning confidence in the results of therapeutic intervention studies and the existence of de facto subgroups with opposing ideologies, a situation which is responsible for an

unclear role profile of the psychiatrist. As for the challenges from outside, professor Katschnig referred about: mounting patient and carer criticism; intrusion of other professions into psychiatry's traditional field of competence; and psychiatry's low status within medicine and in society in general. Studies suggest that the decline of the recruitment into psychiatry, as it is observed in many countries, might be related to problems arising from these challenges. He continued with rather sceptical tone and stated, that it is unclear whether psychiatry will survive as a unitary medical discipline or whether those segments which are more rewarding, both financially and in status, will break away, leaving the unattractive tasks to carry out by what remains of psychiatry. He concluded that the demise of the generalist and the rise of the specialist in modern society may contribute to this development (Katschnig, 2010).

Another honourable speaker was Professor Howard Goldman from the University of Maryland in Baltimore. His lecture was devoted to the problems of scholarly publishing in the future. In the beginning of his lecture he asked himself a rhetorical question: how is one to distinguish fact from fiction or to appreciate opinions based on evidence from those based on conjecture or ideology, when we live in an era of instant communication and the widespread expression of opinion? He concluded that even though it is an imperfect process, peer-review remains the gold standard to distinguish well-reasoned opinion and evidence-based knowledge from the rest of communication. Arbitrators, so those who assess the quality of articles and set the imaginary bar, are a key variable determining the final "impact" of the publication.

Next speaker, Dr. Umberto Volpe from Italy, who represented the Early Career Psychiatrists Committee of the European Psychiatric Association, devoted his lecture "Toward a new agenda for European young psychiatrists" to important challenges for psychiatrists in early phases of their careers. He pointed out that psychiatry will become a multidisciplinary field, where psychiatrists will play a different role than in the past. This is also related to the improvement of psychiatric care and the clinical paradigm shifts (e.g. from hospital based to the community oriented models of practice) the contrast between different disease explicative models (e.g. the phenomenological tradition vs. the new advances of psychiatric genetics and neuroimaging), the spread of new models of psychotherapy and rehabilitative approaches, or the use of different technologies within the discipline. He stated, that while senior psychiatrists probably had the time to gradually adapt to such changes, early career psychiatrists might have difficulties to cope adequately with this new professional framework, updating their skills and knowledge without losing previous psychiatric experiences and traditions (e.g. disappearance of some diagnostic units like catatonia or hebephrenic schizophrenia and detection of new units like the dependence on the internet, or already known, but due to globalization phenomena set in a different cultural framework).

In the second part of the academic day, Czech leading experts in psychiatry presented their views on the future of psychiatry with specific regard to Czech psychiatric heritage. Professor Eva Češková from Brno focused in her lecture on the

possibilities of present and future psychopharmacotherapy trends. She focused mainly on the antidepressants and antipsychotics drugs and did not forget to highlight the “Czech footprint” in the history of psychopharmacology discoveries (Vojtěchovský, Protiva, Vinař and others). Professor Ján Praško from Olomouc talked about the future trends in psychotherapy and emphasized its indispensable place in the care of psychiatric patients. In an attractive way he also took the audience through its history with all the divergent directions and pathways, starting with the pioneer of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud. The last presenter Dr. Filip Španiel from Prague Psychiatric Center attracted attention of the delegates with his project ITAREPS (Information Technology Aided Relapse Prevention in Schizophrenia). ITAREPS is focused on fast and targeted recognition of early warning signs of psychotic illness and its management, through the use of modern information and communication technologies.

The main way in which delegates can get involved in the activities of EFPT do present the working groups. In the working groups delegates are discussing numerous burning topics connected to the psychiatric training or research. One day and half were devoted to this working groups and the main venue for that during the fourth day of the forum become the Psychiatric Hospital Bohnice. One of the most active one is the working group on research, which currently carries out several surveys/projects (e.g. Psychiatric residents and industry relations survey, Attitudes of non-psychiatric medical educators, Teaching experiences: A Europe-wide perspective). A newly established working group on Exchange of psychiatric trainees intends to organize the short-term clinical or research internships. Fifteen countries expressed interest in participating in this project, which should begin in the beginning of 2012. The project aims to raise awareness of the intercultural aspects of psychiatry, offer trainees the chance to become familiar with different systems of care for the mentally ill in Europe and generally strengthen the mutual relations of European psychiatric trainees. The other working group on establishing and maintaining a national trainee association had again a lot of work with helping newcoming delegations (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Spain) with the start of their trainee organizations. Psychotherapy working group decided among other actions to create space in the social network Twitter for psychiatrists with an interest in psychotherapy. Child and adolescent working group presented the results of a survey targeting the areas of education, finance, research and supervision options.

The intention of each delegation in the poster section was to outline in entertaining and inventive way how they imagine the future of psychiatry or psychiatric training. In the strong competition of creatively made posters, both in content and especially in terms of visual design, the Croatian delegation won. Their literally theatrical performance depicting psychiatric intervention in the distant future, received the highest recognition from other delegations.

Last, the fifth day of the forum was as usually filled by the General Assembly with all the formalities like presentations of depicting the activity of the organization

in the last year, the approval of the Action Plan of the organization, concluding statements of the working groups and election of the new board of directors of EFPT. Dr. Florian Riese from Switzerland was elected for the position of the president-elect of EFPT for the period 2012/2013. Dr. Riese will replace Dr. Domenico Giacco from Italy, who in the very end invited all delegates to the jubilee 20th EFPT forum in Sorrento, which will take place from 21st to 26th May 2012.

The organizers of the EFPT forum in Prague would like to thank all sponsors for their support; Czech Psychiatric Association ČLS JEP, Neuropsychiatric Forum, Czech Neuropsychopharmacological Society and the European Psychiatric Association.

If you want to learn more about the EFPT organization, please visit website www.efpt.eu or write an e-mail to a.nawka@gmail.com.

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