

AEP news

Diploma course in management for medical doctors in Ireland

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It is now widely recognized that management training is vital for psychiatrists in training, particularly senior registrars and newly appointed consultants (Jadresic, 1992). The Irish Department of Health's strategy document 'Shaping a Healthier Future' (1994) emphasizes the need to strengthen the management capacity of professionals in the health service. Management training is available for Irish Physicians in the form of a 1 year diploma course which is run jointly by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). The course aims to aid doctors in developing management knowledge and skills, whilst providing participants with an understanding of health management concepts and techniques. Numbers are strictly limited to 45 participants per year and since its commencement the development of an annual waiting list has been a testament to its increasing popularity.

The broad curriculum encompasses management theory and practice, people management, quality assessment and audit, economic aspects of health services management, resource allocation, financial management, planning and information, interpersonal effectiveness, and legal aspects of health care. These topics are addressed both in the Irish and international contexts. The format consists of two 90 minute sessions on a Friday evening, which are varied. They comprise didactic learning, informal presentations, role play, case studies, in addition to small and large group discussions. However, there are some drawbacks. Didacticism can be boring at times, which concerned us, as did the fact that handouts of literature were not always promptly available. Additionally, there may be a certain amount of frustration at being lectured to by nonmedical managers.

A system of continuous assessment operates throughout the course year and participants must complete two essay assignments. This practical part of the course proved to be a highly effective way of learning management skills. The first assignment consisted of writing a job description illustrating the purpose of the participants' current position. The second assignment required the participants to outline a structured recruitment and selection programme, again for their own job. One of the most interesting aspects of this course is the obligatory 'management project'. Participants are

required to identify a salient area of work that is appropriate for management action and to prepare and set up an action plan, and examine the subsequent outcome. Our projects involved the setting up of a clozapine clinic (DS), the reduction of a waiting list in a child guidance clinic (LC), and conducting an audit in a lithium clinic (LM). Many projects double up as research projects and numerous participants received admiration in their workplace for tackling problems that would otherwise have been left unattended. Candidates are required to submit a written report of their project, as well as presenting it to course directors at the end of term, which of course affords participants further experience in presentation skills. At the end of the course year there is a 2 hour written examination. Participants who complete the course and examination successfully are awarded the diploma in management. Despite certain criticisms mentioned earlier, this course proved to be both enjoyable and educational. It is therefore recommended by the authors.

Bristow MF, Douzenis A. What's so good about the Kings Fund management course? *Psychiatric Bulletin* 1993; 16:86–7

Harrison J, Creed F. A course for recently appointed consultants *Psychiatric Bulletin* 1996;20:292–3

Jadresic, D. Management training – what do we need? *Psychiatric Bulletin* 1992;18:164–5

Richardson GJR. Management training – the experience *Psychiatric Bulletin* 1990;14:721–2

Shaping a healthier future: a strategy for effective healthcare in the 1990s (1994) Department of Health, Ireland

Sigmund: a European database of mental health surveys

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General population studies of mental health are costly to implement and the large databanks which they produce are often underexploited. New studies are frequently launched for which data is often presently available but unknown. With the support of the European Union Biomed program, we have undertaken the development of a European mental health database (Sigmund) which centralizes information on all known health surveys and general population epidemiological studies which have a mental health component. Computer software has been developed which permits us to register each study,

including information such as pathologies targeted according to ICD10 and ICDH criteria, nature of population, financial sponsorship, time period, diagnostic criteria, instruments used, publications, accessibility, cost of data, etc.

This database may be consulted free of charge (except where extensive print-outs or copies of the original protocol are requested). Examples of the wide variety of enquiries which may be answered by Sigmund are "Where have longitudinal studies of depression been conducted in Europe and with what age group?", "Who has funded studies of alcoholism?", "Is information available on child mental health in Spain and can this be accessed free of charge?", "Which longitudinal studies

of dementia have published incidence data?", "Which instruments have been used to investigate population mental health in Greece and Italy?" and so on.

At the present time 68 surveys have been registered from 11 European countries. The database is not complete and we would like to call on colleagues around Europe to send us details of any mental health studies which have been conducted in their country and have not been already registered. Any costs involved in procuring such information will be met by the databank coordination. We also invite all persons for whom this utility may be of use (researchers, clinicians, policy-makers, help organizations, etc) to consult the base freely by contacting us at the given address.