



A Trainee's Introduction to Perinatal Psychiatry

General Adult Psychiatry has always appealed to me due to the diversity of disorders and patients found in this broad specialty. One area within General Adult Psychiatry, in which I was fortunate enough to spend six-months during the third year of my core training, was Perinatal Psychiatry.

Incredible transformations

Having had no experience in an obstetric post during my foundation years, I wondered whether this might prove challenging due to the extent of overlap between psychiatry and this medical specialty, however I was excited about working in my local Mother and Baby Unit, as it is a specialized tertiary unit, and one of only 22 in the country.

As the junior doctor in a team that provided a service to a busy urban centre and the surrounding county areas, I was able to experience working with patients in many settings as I was involved with assessments and follow-up in the community, out-patient clinics, and in hospital (both inpatients on the Mother and Baby Unit and regular urgent referrals from the obstetric wards on two city sites). I needn't have worried. I found the job varied, rewarding and even challenging at times, but learnt a great deal. My favourite part of the job was spending time with the women who were inpatients on our unit.

In this specialty I met the most unwell patients that I have ever come across in my three years of psychiatry training, and witnessed the most incredible transformations as they started to recover. The most rewarding part for me was to see the change in the relationship between a mother and her baby as the mother's mental state began to improve; the pure delight that the mother experienced from her baby in contrast to the anxiety, fear or disinterest that she might have felt towards the child previously.

Impact

Working in this specialty also made me realize that mental illness in pregnancy and postpartum can affect anyone, as I followed the experiences of women who had previously been psychiatrically well, some of whom were pre-morbidly highly functioning in jobs similar to my own. I was also fascinated by our patients' differing social and cultural circumstances, although I sadly saw how unsupportive relationships had in some cases had a catastrophic impact on patients' mental wellbeing.

The job offered much experience in working in a busy multidisciplinary team and with other medical disciplines and agencies such as Social Services. I am now working in Liaison Psychiatry, another sub-specialty where psychiatry interfaces with other areas of medicine.

Holistic approach

As I commence my Specialist Registrar training in General Adult Psychiatry, I feel that the sub-specialties of Perinatal and Liaison Psychiatry have taught me the importance of taking a holistic view of the patient. I have learnt not to underestimate the significance of personal and social circumstances, or indeed of physical health. I hope to spend another year during my higher training in Perinatal Psychiatry in a few years time.

Katie Williams
CT3 in Liaison Psychiatry
Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham