Stress management

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**TIPS**
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Ensure that you apply to take the examinations in plenty of time, as forms must be completed and returned to the College. On the examination day, make sure that you arrive at the examination venue in plenty of time.

If you are not successful

There may be various reasons why you were not successful and it is important to find out why it happened so you can address the issues. Feedback from the College’s Professional Standards Department will be sent to you. It is also advisable to seek advice from your College tutor and your educational supervisor – listen carefully to their suggestions and make notes so that you can look over them later. If you have failed a particular part of the examination, ensure that this area is an identified learning need. While you focus on this area, continue to revise the other sections of the curriculum, with a range of consultants. This should help you to regain your confidence. Changes may be needed in your attitude, knowledge base or skills, and you may need to widen your clinical experience.

Sources of further help and support

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Further reading


**Curriculum**

The new curriculum for psychiatric training has been designed to ensure that a high standard of training is accomplished using a patient-based and learner-centred approach. The curriculum (www.rcpsych.ac.uk/training/curriculum2010.aspx) defines the competencies, professional behaviour and attitudes which psychiatrists should acquire and demonstrate in their clinical practice.

Workplace-based assessments (WPBAs) will take place throughout the 6 years of specialist training and competencies will be rated according to the level of training. Psychiatrists in training must register with the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ Portfolio Online (http://training.rcpsych.ac.uk) and complete their mandatory WPBAs. The evidence collected in the assessments will form part of the annual review of competence progression (ARCP), at which educational supervisors and College tutors review your training.

**MRCPsych examination**

The College membership (MRCPsych) examinations comprise three written papers (MRCPsych Papers 1, 2 and 3), each of which is 3-hours long and contains approximately 200 questions. The papers include the ‘best answer 1 of 5’ format, multiple choice questions and extended matching items. Following the written papers there is a Clinical Assessment of Skills and Competencies (CASC) examination. This is a 16-station examination, testing candidates’ competency in clinical skills, appropriate to their stage of training. The examination is split into two sets of eight stations. One set comprises stations linked in pairs; the clinical task in the first station will be linked to a related task in the second station. The other set is made up of individual ‘stand-alone’ stations.

The written Papers 1, 2 and 3 can be taken at any time and in any order once you are a trainee in a post-foundation post in psychiatry. The CASC examination can be taken after successful completion of Papers 1, 2 and 3 and if you have a minimum of 24 months’ experience in post-foundation training in psychiatry.

Further details regarding exams regulations can be found on the College website (www.rcpsych.ac.uk/exams/regulationsandcurricula.aspx)

Trainees are advised to start studying early in their specialist training years and to pace their studies throughout training.

**TIPS**

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- Find a place to study that is quiet and comfortable
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- Set aside a regular time to study
- Allow time for preparation and breaks from studying
- Keep a balance between work and personal life

**Preparation**

The following tips may help you go through the assessments and examinations more easily:

- Study the curriculum
- Plan when you are going to take the examinations (take account of your personal circumstances)
- Seek advice from those who have already passed the exam, especially those who have done so recently
- Create your own study programme
- Plan your application for study leave/revision courses
- Form a study group with others who are also preparing for the exam
- Practise scenarios for the CASC with others who have done the exam before.

**Study skills and techniques**

Postgraduate examinations require a significantly greater depth and breadth of knowledge than undergraduate examinations. There is no escape from having to learn vast amounts of information to pass the MRCPsych examination.

It is important to reinforce memory by revising and by practising recall. Clinical scenarios are useful especially for the CASC.

Belonging to a study group may help you reduce your workload of finding information and enable you to share experience and provide support to each other. Study groups also aid reflection on progress.

It is important to discuss learning and your progress with your educational supervisor. If you lack experience or would benefit from more training in a particular area, make sure these educational needs are addressed.

**Practice**

Core competencies are the basis of the new format for training so it is important to use every opportunity to learn and practise clinical skills. Practise a variety of scenarios to prepare for the WPBAs. Other mental health professionals will be involved in these assessments and trainees will need skills in teamworking.

**TIPS**

- Find out what is required at your level of training
- Do not get downhearted if you do not achieve high marks in the early stages of training, your marks should improve during training
- Plan your WPBAs at the beginning of each post and relate this to your learning objectives
- Keep the necessary paperwork to hand
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- Obtain feedback and take steps to improve your performance

**Theory**

The core curriculum has sections which must be covered. There are various ways of approaching this – some trainees skim all sections and then return to studying specific topics in depth, others methodically study each section in turn before moving to the next. Choose the method that works best for you.
This information guide is intended for trainee psychiatrists who are preparing for their assessments and postgraduate examinations. The information should be used as a guide only and is not a substitute for professional advice. For further information on the MRCPsych examinations and the core competencies, see the College website (www.rcpsych.ac.uk) or contact the College’s Professional Standards Department, tel: 020 7235 2351 ext 6252. If you need further advice and support, please contact the Psychiatrists’ Support Service.

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