Promoting Recruitment in Psychiatry

Dr Helen Sharrard, our South West Division Consultant Representative for Recruitment, talks us through her ideas and achievements.

Why I think it is important to get involved in promoting recruitment

Psychiatrists are well aware of influences that discourage medical students and junior doctors from applying to psychiatric rotations – the perception that psychiatry is remote from mainstream medicine, is ‘unscientific’, with ‘difficult’ and ‘untreatable’ patients and that it is held in low esteem by other doctors. In addition to this, in recent times a crisis has developed in CT1 psychiatry recruitment. I have enjoyed my psychiatric career and wanted to play a part in encouraging students and doctors to consider psychiatry as an option.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists Recruitment Strategy was set up in 2011 to increase recruitment to the CT1 grade of Psychiatry Training, aiming for a 50% increase in applications and 95% fill rate by 2015.

A Committee, Promoting Recruitment into Psychiatry (PRiP), has been set up. The campaign is co-ordinated centrally but the work is done through College Divisions. I set up the Severn and the Peninsula Network Groups to facilitate and coordinate work in the two Deaneries. Each group has a lead trainee who accompanies me to central college meetings. The Networks have extensive membership lists and the 4-6 monthly meetings are attended by a selection of dedicated medical students, trainees and consultants. The main areas of the recruitment strategy are:

- Pre-medical school – working with senior school pupils.
- Medical School – a variety of areas including supporting Psychiatry Societies, influencing teaching, developing student selected components (SSC) projects etc.
- Foundation Programme – increasing Taster placements, new Autumn School etc.
- Addressing the factors that have a negative influence.

Recruitment to CT1 has increased 19% to a 90% fill rate by round two nationally. This is a great success that we have been able to match in the South West, proving the value of the efforts in recruitment locally.

Dr Ami Kothari and Dr Liz Ewins describe the South West Division projects in more detail:

We are pleased with the high level of activity we have maintained in the local recruitment drive. Particularly with the work we have done at the earliest stages, promoting psychiatry to school students through regular presentations backed up with well developed Royal College resource packages. Liaison with local mental health trusts in the south west is making good headway to enable access to good quality work experience placements, a scheme that is well supported centrally.

Foundation year taster opportunities have been embraced wholeheartedly in the south west. The innovative trainee-led Taster Day Scheme has been set up successfully in the Severn Deanery allowing foundation doctors who haven’t had access to a job in psychiatry the chance to gain experience in the specialty. It has received very positive feedback from all involved, including the local Foundation School who are encouraging other specialties to
follow this model. We are pleased to announce that the scheme is also rolling out across the Peninsula Deanery this autumn.

As well as linking with local deaneries and foundation schools, we have strengthened links with medical students through local Universities. Both Bristol and Peninsula have their own Psychiatry Societies and we have been particularly impressed with the level of enthusiasm from local medical students in organising events such as MedFest. Psychiatrists have been able to contribute to the admission panels at Bristol University and those that have interviewed have found the experience interesting and enjoyable. We continue to have a strong presence at regional careers fairs and recruitment events.

We are most excited about our latest trainee led project; Bristol’s first Autumn School. This is a two day event in October full of lectures, master classes, clinical experiences and networking events. We have been very appreciative of the support and funding this has received from the South West Division and Severn Deanery. We are proud of our reputation for being very active in promoting recruitment to psychiatry in the south west and we look forward to updating you on these exciting projects in the next eNewsletter.

If you would like more information on any of the projects mentioned (the resources for promoting psychiatry to school students is available upon request to Abby Watts) and would like to get involved, please get in touch with us via the South West Division office.