Psychiatry Summer School for sixth-formers: Improving access to work experience in mental health for school students

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Aims of the event
A Psychiatry Summer School for sixth-formers was held in the last week of July 2014 led by Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership Medical Education department and the University of Bristol. The event consisted of taught sessions, work experience with Consultant Psychiatrists and GPs, and a social event.

The Summer School aimed to:
- **Help local sixth-formers explore the possibility of applying for medicine and give them advice on how to apply**
- **Provide them with an opportunity for work experience in psychiatry**
- **Encourage applications to medicine from students who may be in some way disadvantaged from applying.**

**Background**

For students hoping to apply to medical school, work experience essential for applications can be difficult to arrange. This is especially the case for work experience in mental health1.

Events such as Summer Schools are recommended by the British Medical Association Medical Students Committee and the Medical Schools Council2. A local Summer School event would fit in with the Royal College of Psychiatrists recruitment strategy3. It would provide more exposure to psychiatry, challenging negative views and stigma surrounding mental health4.

Medical student applications are less frequently from state schools5. A Summer School targeting sixth formers from local state schools may help them to explore the possibility of applying and provide them with advice on how to do so6.

**Method**

An initial scoping meeting was held in January 2014 consisting of interested Psychiatry Consultants and Trainees, representation from Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Trust (AWP) and the University of Bristol.

A working group was established to develop the Summer School through a series of monthly meetings. After consultation and liaison with AWP, a new work experience policy was developed to reduce the age of those allowed to apply for work experience to 17 years of age6. A financial plan for the event and a location was secured through liaison with AWP, the University of Bristol and the Royal College of Psychiatrists South West Division.

Local and national similar events were consulted and researched7,8,9,10 to provide ideas for a non-residential, week-long programme of events to be held over Summer at end of Year 12 (before the University and College Admissions Service application deadline). Work experience placements were organised to be led by Psychiatry Consultants and local GPs. Trainees and medical students were recruited and briefed on being mentors, to provide advice and support before, during and after the event.

Connections were made with local schools and flyers and information was sent out to promote the event. Applicants were short-listed and a pre-course questionnaire sent out. Feedback was then gathered from students and parents/guardians following the event.

**Results and feedback**

Over 30 applications were received from local sixth-formers for the 18 available places. Of the 18 successful students, three quarters were from local state schools, and 5 were from a widening participation background.

The students were asked what 3 words they would use to describe psychiatry before and after the Summer School.

The students were asked how confident they felt about applying to medical school before and after the event. The proportion of students feeling very confident or confident rose from 33% to 56% after the event.

**Conclusion**

Summer Schools are an excellent way to help students learn more about medicine. Psychiatry Summer School events provide valuable exposure to mental health care which is in line with national guidance1,2,3, with the additional bonus of reducing negative views and stigma in school students4 as well as helping those students who may be disadvantaged from applying to medicine. The success of structured work experience such as this should enable health Trusts to further enable work experience for school students.