



Royal College of Psychiatrists

Volunteers Programme 2006

RATIONALE

Many low and middle income countries are known to suffer either from an acute shortage of psychiatrists (e.g. the UK has around 1 psychiatrist per 15-25,000 population whereas the ratio in sub-Saharan Africa is less than 1 psychiatrist per million population and India has around 4 psychiatrists per 1 million), or a skills gap (e.g. Eastern Europe experiences the historic isolation from the rest of the international community and knowledge base), with consequences for both specialist and primary care mental health services in those countries.

The College has many practising and recently retired consultant psychiatrists who are prepared to offer their time to support other countries. Potential recipient countries do not have ready access to the details of psychiatrists who would be prepared to help and psychiatrists do not have ready access to the details of countries where their help might be valued. The College is therefore in an ideal position to play a key role in facilitating contacts between countries and psychiatrists willing to offer support.

Since its conception in September 2001, the Board of International Affairs has been working towards setting up a framework that would facilitate such support in a structured and co-ordinated way that is tailored to meeting countries' needs. This work has now been completed and a database of relevant information that can be exchanged between interested parties has been established.

PLACEMENTS FOR CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRISTS

The idea is simple: the College will keep the database of volunteers and potential host institutions and on receipt of an application from a host country we will identify a suitable volunteer whose skills, availability, language competence, etc. match the host's requirements. We will make all necessary pre-placement arrangements with the volunteer, including mentoring and country specific advice if necessary. The host institution will identify a local mentor able to offer initial induction as well as regular contact, assistance and advice to the volunteer

throughout the placement. A pre-placement meeting with the volunteer, the mentor and the College co-ordinators will be arranged to discuss details of the placement and to identify any practical arrangements to be made, e.g. local transport, accommodation, subsistence, etc. We will maintain regular contact with the volunteer and the host institution to ensure that any problems that might arise are resolved quickly and effectively.

PLACEMENTS FOR TRAINEES

Additionally, the scheme offers an opportunity to establish out of programme placements for trainees. Specialist Registrars in their second or third year of training will be eligible for an overseas placement approved by a relevant SAC for up to one year of higher training. It is anticipated that trainees will choose a placement in a country relevant to the Trust in which they are training. If there are many immigrants in a Trust catchment area from one particular part of the world, e.g. South Asia or Africa, there may be mutual benefit for an ongoing relationship to be established with mental health services in that country.

The placement should offer an affiliation or formal attachment to a university department, a hospital or the ministry of health. This will be important if any research or audit being carried out requires ethical or other approval, and will ensure that relevant organisations know about the trainee's project so that it does not interfere with other national programmes. The trainees might also be able to benefit from resources such as library facilities.

All trainees will have an in-country mentor who would usually be either a Member or Fellow of the College or an individually approved senior psychiatrist. Wherever possible, the College will endeavour to place a consultant volunteer with the trainee in the same area thus providing opportunities for mutual support, supervision and mentoring for the trainee.

All trainees will have an identified mentor in the UK who has knowledge of the country of placement and is (usually) an approved trainer in the UK. The trainee will be expected to meet their mentor before their departure and on their return, and to maintain fortnightly email contact throughout their placement. The UK programme director will monitor progress. Trainees will be expected to write a detailed report about either an audit or research project or a clinical case study, with supervision from the UK mentor.

It is hoped that placements offered by institutions and centres in developing countries will be approved by a local authority, i.e. either an educational institution, a medical regulatory body, a local professional association and/or the department/ministry of health.

FINANCES

Funding remains one of the main difficulties. There are no major donors for this kind of work and we believe that, initially, all volunteers will be willing to fund their own travel with the host institution providing what they can, e.g. basic accommodation, a local salary, local transport, etc. The College provides the administrative infrastructure for the programme and we have been able to raise a small grant from the Arpana Charity to give limited support to the first few trainees' placements depending on circumstances. The costs of regular fundraising are prohibitive with limited staff resources.

For more information, please contact **Joanna Carroll, International Manager**, on
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