

Extracurricular Psychiatry Enrichment Programmes for Undergraduate Medical Students: A Systematic Review

Dr Sharna Bennett^{1,2}, Dr Tiago Gameiro- Inacio^{1,2}, Dr Joanne Rodda^{1,2}
Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust¹, Kent and Medway Medical School²

INTRODUCTION

- Psychiatry is a rewarding specialty, yet many medical students have **limited exposure**
- Despite psychiatry training posts recently achieving **high fill rates** (99.8% in 2023 and 100% in 2024)^{1,2}, **negative attitudes** remain
- Extracurricular enrichment programmes are optional learning experiences that extend clinical, academic or experiential engagement with psychiatry and may:
 - Improve attitudes
 - Increase engagement
 - Encourage early career interest
- Enrichment activities include: special study modules, electives, mentoring schemes, summer schools and clubs.

AIM

To **systematically review** literature on extracurricular psychiatry enrichment programmes for undergraduate medical students.

Specific objectives :

- Understand the types of extracurricular enrichment programmes
- Understand student experiences
- Explore the impact on attitudes towards psychiatry, mental illness, career intentions and eventual specialty outcome

METHOD

- Systematic review conducted according with PRISMA guidelines
- PROSPERO** registered (CRD420251025990)
- Four databases searched (Embase, MEDLINE, APA PsycINFO, ERIC)
- Searches conducted 17th October 2025
- Inclusion criteria:** studies of undergraduate medical students participating in psychiatry extracurricular programmes, evaluating at least one review outcome
- Dual independent screening and data extraction
- Studies critically appraised using Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (**MMAT**)
- Narrative synthesis** undertaken to consolidate findings

RESULTS

Number of studies included: 27

Countries included: 10 (most commonly USA and UK)

Programme characteristics:

- Programme types: summer school, mentoring, elective courses, special study modules, student-led clinics, film/media-based activities.
- Programme duration: 1 day to 5 years

Key outcomes:

- Positive student feedback across all programme types, film and media were a popular approach
- Improved attitudes towards psychiatry and mental illness with increased empathy and reduced stigma reported in several studies
- Of 18 studies of career intentions, 16 reported increased interest in a career in psychiatry
- 6 out of 7 studies reported higher match rates into psychiatry training
- Improvements observed in psychiatry knowledge tests

LIMITATIONS

- Heterogeneity** of study design with large variation in programme duration
- High risk of **self-selection bias** due to pre-existing interest in psychiatry
- Often **self-reported** outcomes using non-validated tools
- Mainly small, single-centre studies
- Lack of **long-term follow-up**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Future studies to include students **without pre-existing interest** in psychiatry to better understand the influence of programmes
- Smaller-scale opportunities and activities embedded into the curriculum to **aid inclusivity and accessibility** for all students
- More long-term follow-up to fully understand the impact of programmes on recruitment into psychiatry

CONCLUSION

- Despite potential self-selection bias , literature suggests that these programmes provide **positive student experiences**, and foster **improved attitudes** and early interest in psychiatry
- By supporting early engagement with the specialty, such programmes may contribute to future psychiatry **workforce development**
- Future enrichment initiatives should prioritise **inclusivity** and accessible design to ensure benefit for all medical students

References:

- NHS England | Workforce, training and education | Medical Hub [Internet]. [cited 2025 Aug 23]. 2023 England Recruitment Fill Rates | Workforce, training and education | NHS England. Available from: <https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/fill-rates/2023-fill-rates/2023-england-recruitment-fill-rates>
- NHS England | Workforce, training and education | Medical Hub [Internet]. [cited 2025 Aug 23]. 2024 England Recruitment Fill Rates | Workforce, training and education | NHS England. Available from: <https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/fill-rates/2024-fill-rates/2024-england-recruitment-fill-rates>

PRISMA FLOWCHART

