Royal College of Psychiatrists
Medical Student Psychotherapy Strategy

Dr Sarah Majid
Consultant Psychiatrist in Psychotherapy
University College London Medical School
Chair RCPsych Medical Student Psychotherapy Scheme Working Group
Why teach psychotherapy to Medical Students?

• Patient-centred and holistic approach integrating psychological and physical aspects of illness

• Developing clinical skills in understanding and negotiating Doctor-Patient relationships.

• Supporting resilience and reducing burnout in developing clinicians

• Promoting recruitment to Psychiatry and Psychotherapy
OVERVIEW

• HISTORY OF THE STUDENT PSYCHOTHERAPY AND BALINT GROUP SCHEMES
• RESEARCH INTO THE SCHEMES
• UCLH STUDENT PSYCHOTHERAPY SCHEME
• UCLH BALINT GROUP SCHEMES
• PSYCHOTHERAPY IN GENERAL PSYCHIATRY
• ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS NATIONAL ROLL OUT
HISTORY AND BACKGROUND
UCH STUDENT PSYCHOTHERAPY SCHEME

• Student Psychotherapy Scheme (SPS) Dept of Psychological Medicine in UCH (1958)

• Started informally with medical students meeting a patient in psychiatric OPD to present to the Consultant Psychiatrist. For some cases, further meetings arranged to discuss difficulties with medical students and report back. For some continued for up to a year under supervision.

• Development of more formal scheme with a supervision group, waiting list, and referrals from surgical, obstetric and gynaecology teams where students might have seen them through liaison psychiatry teaching.

• Flagship Scheme, since replicated abroad in Germany, Switzerland and other Medical Schools in the UK.

• Currently students see cases for once weekly supportive psychodynamically informed therapy for a year. Small group supervision with high level of support. Carefully selected patients with low risk, typically referred from primary care psychology.
RESEARCH ON THE STUDENT PSYCHOTHERAPY SCHEME

• Heidelberg Study (Knauss & Senff 1985) SPS set up in Psychosomatics Clinic.

• Demonstrates positive outcomes for medical student learning and for patients.

• Impact on Students
  • Able to be better listeners and build therapeutic relationships
  • Manage disturbing experiences such as anxiety and uncertainty
  • Be more relaxed discussing embarrassing problems (e.g., sexual)

• Increased awareness of emotional and psychological difficulties
• Awareness of links to physical illness
• Ability to handle separations
• Increased acceptance of own limitations
• Coping with feelings of guilt or hopelessness esp for terminally ill patients.
RESEARCH ON THE STUDENT PSYCHOTHERAPY SCHEME

- *Impact on patients (Heidelberg Study)*

- *87% good or very good progress at FU*

- Improvements patients well being (self esteem, reduced anxiety, independence in social relationships, increased capacity to express anger).

- Improvements in physical symptoms (dizziness, numbness, chest and abd pain)

- Psychological improvements at end of treatment sustained at 2yr FU

- Pt’s valued ‘opportunity to tell’ as most significant factor, and reported emotional release, new areas of experience, improved self esteem and personal relationships.
RESEARCH INTO UCH SCHEMES

- Retrospective Study of 200 students attending UCH 1982-92.
  - Positive impact on career choice Psychiatry
  - Dr’s who hadn’t become psychiatrists said how valuable in current work: esp GP’s.

- Randomised Controlled Trial comparing impact of Balint Group and SPS
  - Showed positive impact of both Schemes on improved awareness of Dr/Pt Relationship

- (Sturgeon, 1986; Franks, 1987; Yakeley, 2004; Yakeley et al, 2011)
Medical Student Balint Group Schemes

- Started by Michael Balint, who first ran discussion groups for Medical Students in UCH in late 1960’s

- Patient Centred Medicine and understanding about the emotional aspects of illness.

- Opportunity to meet students during their first clinical encounters with patients and as teachers model a reflective, attentive and non-judgemental attitude to feelings stirred up by patients and illness

- Counter to pressures to manage affect through splitting, denial, dissociation, projection and manic defences.

- Supporting developing clinicians in building skills in reflection, empathy, communication and understanding psychological processes in the doctor patient relationship
LEARNING ABOUT THE DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

• Number of research studies demonstrating the positive impact of Balint Groups on clinicians - and specifically on medical students

• Improved awareness of Doctor-Patient relationship (Yakeley et al, 2011)

• Positive impact on measures of Empathy (Buffel du Vaure et al, 2017)

• Clinician resilience? (Student adapted Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

• Fear of Compassion? Scales suggest many students have high self criticism, struggle receiving compassion from self/other.
What do students talk about?

• Qualitative study identified key challenges for medical students in starting clinical work (Suckling, 2005)

• Students reported increased confidence, communication skills, reflection, support and enjoyment in their work after participation in the group.

• Past academic year invaluable space for students to talk about fears and traumatic experiences caring for patients with Covid.

• range of distressing and confusing experiences including disturbing behaviour by senior colleagues

• death and dying patients

• revulsion towards patients

• angry attacking patients

• identifications with family members

• ethical and clinical dilemmas

• anxieties about history taking and physical examination

• professional boundaries

• student role confusion in medical hierarchy
UCLH BALINT GROUP PROGRAMME

• 4th Year Balint Group Programme
• Introductory lecture with voluntary sign up
• Evening Group 1.5hrs for 11weeks in Spring Term
• Co-facilitated by Balint Trained General Practitioner & Consultant Psychotherapist
• Reflective Essay
• Fortnightly 4th yr follow up group till end of the academic year (ongoing)
• Opportunity to join National medical Student Balint Group till end of clinical training.
UCLH BALINT GROUP PROGRAMME

• New 5th Year Balint Group Programme (Sept 20-Jun21)

• Embedded in Core Undergraduate Psychiatry Placement

• All students allocated to a 6 week Balint Group (1hr online)

• Co-leadership Balint GP and Consultant/ Trainee Psychiatrist

• Students encouraged to bring cases from previous clinical placements (ie not just psychiatry) and HCA/ICU Covid work.
UCLH Psychotherapy Teaching

• 3 Psychotherapy lectures embedded in 5th yr Medical Student Teaching

• Model of the mind: key concepts from psychoanalysis including unconscious, structural model (id, ego, super-ego), defence mechanisms, impact of trauma, containment, transference, countertransference and attachment

• Applications in psychiatric and general medical contexts including psychodynamic formulation, reflecting on the therapeutic relationship, group dynamics in staff teams/wards, institutional defences

• Overview of psychological treatment modalities and suitability for individual and group psychotherapy
A Balint Group in Every Med School?

- Royal College Psychiatrists promotion of Balint Group Schemes in all UK Medical Schools.
- Medical Student Psychotherapy Scheme Working Group to promote development of BG Schemes at a National level
- Currently 19/33 Medical Schools have some form of Balint Group or Reflective Case Discussion Group.
- Huge variation in funding, length of group programme, level of training of leaders and student attendance
- Challenges to extending Balint work in Uk and US