Developing a peer-supportive environment for Core Trainees in the West Midlands

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Background
Isolation has been a recognised issue within psychiatry training, in part due to the geographical locations of training posts across services. (1,2) The Supported and Valued review by the Psychiatric Trainees’ Committee in 2017 identified that trainees valued the support of their peers. (3) Icebreakers have been shown to improve sense of camaraderie amongst trainees in other medical specialities. (4)

From 2019-20, the Birmingham MRCPsych teaching programme introduced wellbeing-focussed sessions designed to support peer networking and promote psychological safety within the cohort; here we present an overview of one of these initiatives.

Methods
In September 2019, a welcome session was held for CT1 trainees, incorporating practical whole-group challenges and small group tasks.

The session was facilitated by a local theatre director and the cohort tutor, and lasted for three hours.

Exercises included:
• ‘Name Game’ – group introductions
• Peer introductions – introduce a peer to the group in more detail
• Icebreaker Bingo
• Small group discussion: Aspirations and Anxieties

28 trainees attended the session, of which 7 gave their feedback about the relevance, content and delivery of the session as well as free text comments (25%).

How to Play: Name Game
• Everyone stands in a circle
• Each person introduces themselves in turn and demonstrates an action beginning with the same letter as their first name
• e.g. Helen, hopping
• The next person has to repeat all of the names/actions before them
• The last person has a lot to remember!

Results
Figure 1: Example Bingo sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Met someone famous</th>
<th>Can play the violin</th>
<th>Doesn’t own a TV</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Cumulative Bar Chart of trainee feedback
(1 ‘not at all successful’ to 5 ‘very successful’)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Qualitative Word Cloud

Discussion and Conclusion
Icebreaking promotes a shared group identity and cohesiveness within a cohort of trainees, which in turn creates a peer group with a sense of psychological safety to share concerns. The Covid-19 pandemic prevented this session being repeated for the 2020-21 cohort. Given the utility of the session and how well-received it was by trainees, consideration will be given to how to facilitate and evaluate virtual interactive icebreaking events for future years.