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extra

My taster experience

Sacha Evans

A business man who thought the CIA were 'after him', a recovering cocaine addict with financial problems and a young man refusing to engage with any treatment were some of the memorable patients I met during my taster session. In a single ward round, I managed to 'tick-off' schizophrenia, bipolar affective and borderline personality disorders. For psychiatrists, seeing these types of patient is routine; for foundation doctors, our exposure may be limited to our student attachments.

Following on from Modernising Medical Careers, foundation doctors are expected to make their career choice approximately 16 months after graduating. With only 6% of graduates being offered a psychiatry post during their foundation training, few get direct psychiatry experience. To overcome this, the UK Foundation Programme Office recommends that foundation doctors undertake taster sessions, which is 3 to 5 days' work experience under the guidance of a senior clinician.

My consultant had a well-planned schedule; in 3 days, I managed to fit in a community visit, clinical governance session and audit presentation. I also gained valuable clinical contact on the ward. I became aware of some pertinent issues in psychiatric practice, such as patients' physical health and the use of crisis resolution teams and emergency psychiatric services. It gave me the opportunity to speak to trainees (at different stages of training) to gain their perspectives about a career in psychiatry and find out the all-important tips for success in the application process.

There are challenges; tasters can be difficult to arrange. Before I started, I had to organise two references, visit the human resources department and get a separate Criminal Records Bureau check. The short duration provides a snapshot, rather than the full spectrum of career opportunities in psychiatry. It also relies on having an enthusiastic and proactive sponsor. My experience was overwhelmingly positive and reinforced my belief that psychiatry is the career for me.

For more information about organising tasters see the Foundation Programme Reference Guide Appendix F: Embedded taster experiences template (downloads available from <http://www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk/pages/home/key-documents>).