

Research experience for junior psychiatrists

A new scheme from the Mental Health Research Network (MHRN) gives junior psychiatrists in East Anglia the opportunity to get hands-on, practical experience in trials and studies.

'All psychiatrists are encouraged to do some research as part of their training, but it is sometimes difficult for them to find the right opportunities,' said Dr Jesus Perez, a consultant psychiatrist at Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust who leads the MHRN's regional office in East Anglia, known as the East Anglia 'Hub'.

Now trainee psychiatrists working in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Bedfordshire can apply to get involved in one of the 40 plus studies seeking to recruit participants through the NHS that are supported by the MHRN in the area.

'We are giving up to six young psychiatrists a year the chance to get involved in a study that matches

their interests,' said Dr Perez. 'The experience we offer will also be tailored to the needs of individual studies.'

Nikolett Kabacs' interest for example, is in psychosis, and the Hub team therefore put her in touch with the SEPEA (Social epidemiology of psychosis in East Anglia) study, which aims to find out more about the causes and incidence of psychosis in rural areas. The study team, led by Dr James Kirkbride at Cambridge University, was looking for psychiatrists to carry out assessments of people who have agreed to participate in the research. 'This study was perfect for Nikolett, and the study needed medics,' says Dr Perez.



Dr Jesus Perez: 'We want to create a culture where clinical work and research sit side by side.'

A qualified psychiatrist, Nikolett has been helping to road-test the new MHRN East Anglia scheme since February 2010 and will gain research experience with the SEPEA study for a year. She has also been working with the East Anglia Hub's clinical studies officer Adrian Jackson to become

au fait with OPCRIT, a diagnostic tool that both will be using – Nikolett for SEPEA, and Adrian for one of the research projects running in the area that he supports. ‘We both needed to learn how to use OPCRIT, and to make sure we were using it correctly and accurately,’ said Adrian.

Nikolett’s interest and involvement in research is, at the moment, on top of and separate from her job: she works in Cambridge as part of a community-based team offering treatment, rehabilitation and recovery support to people with a range of different mental health problems. She hopes in future that her team will get involved in research studies and will be advocating for that to happen. Becoming involved with the East Anglia Hub and the SEPEA team has also benefited her clinical practice, she says.

‘The SEPEA study is recruiting through early intervention services so I’ve gained an insight into early intervention and what the service does,’ she said. ‘When Adrian and I were learning to use OPCRIT, we took information from a sample set of 10 patient notes. I realised the importance of making detailed notes and it made me think about the way I interview patients.’

Jesus Perez says he hopes the new East Anglia Hub scheme will get psychiatrists in the region interested in research early on in their careers. ‘We want to increase the number of clinicians who are interested in



Nikolett Kabacs: becoming involved in research has benefited her clinical practice.

research, increase the number of consultants who are capable of taking part in research. We hope by offering this sort of experience to junior psychiatrists that we can contribute towards creating a culture where clinical work and research sit side by side.’

■ The Mental Health Research Network supports research in England carried out with the help of people who use NHS services and people who work in them. The East Anglia ‘Hub’ is one of its eight regional offices. Clinical studies officers based at each of these offices work with NHS mental health professionals to recruit people to MHRN-supported studies. They also offer practical support to research teams. For more information, visit www.mhrn.info



Adrian Jackson: one of the MHRN’s clinical studies officers who work with mental health professionals and support research teams.

■ Trainee psychiatrists can apply to the MHRN East Anglia Hub to gain research experience if they work at: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust; Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust; Suffolk Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust; or in services based in Bedfordshire that are run by South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust. Contact the MHRN East Anglia Hub on 01223 746 135 or email Hub manager Angela Browne, angela.browne@cpft.nhs.uk