

Original article

Postgraduate training for young psychiatrists—experience of the Berlin Summer School

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Received 30 November 2004; accepted 17 May 2005

Available online 08 September 2005

Abstract

Background. – Growing professional exchange between Eastern and Western European countries increases the possibilities for international postgraduate training courses and by that satisfying the need for rapid and facilitation of travel and migration in the enlarged European Union increase achieving high standards. The purpose of this study was to evaluate a summer school program that trained young Eastern European psychiatrists and to assess the impact of the program on their professional development and future activities.

Method. – We evaluated the training effect of the first 3 years of the Berlin Summer School with respect to (1) the participants' satisfaction with the topics, quality and originality of the presentations, and (2) long-term effects and implications for their professional career. All participants ($N = 43$) filled out anonymously the evaluation form at the end of each summer school. An evaluation of long-term effects was carried out 2 years later with a questionnaire that was sent via e-mail to all former participants.

Results. – Participants were most satisfied with practical topics such as “how to prepare a paper”, “how to evaluate a paper”, or “how to participate in a congress.” The appreciation of the presented topics and the appreciation of courses increased in each consecutive summer school. All summer school participants reported that the course had some influence on their future career, and one fifth of the participants felt that their professional development was influenced “a lot”.

Conclusions. – Although limited to 1 week of intensive training, a summer school program can have a longer lasting positive influence on the professional development of the participants. Participants felt that particularly the training of practical skills improved their research performance. Former participants founded an independent multicentric and multinational research group and supported national courses that were organized similar to the Berlin Summer School.

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Keywords: Postgraduate training; Psychiatric training; International networks

1. Introduction

Developing professional skills is an important goal for trainees and young psychiatrists [10,11]. Young psychiatrists are usually well aware of limitations in their knowledge and professional skills, and understand the need for life-long learning [3,8]. In the recent literature, it has been supposed that trainees and trainers perceive a lack of training in non-

clinical skills [5], which would be helpful for the growing professional exchange between Eastern and Western European countries. Facilitation of travel and migration in the enlarged European Union increase the chances for international postgraduate training courses [9] and by that support the need for rapid achieving high standards.

In Europe, there is considerable variation in postgraduate training [6,2]. Therefore, international educational programs should keep in mind differences between European countries in terms of duration of residency, programs of education, but also with respect to the clinical and scientific experience and

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demands of young psychiatrists [4,12]. The most adequate development of (clinical and non-clinical) professional skills of European psychiatric trainees may be to organize multi-level courses, which are adapted to each target group and respect differences and previous experiences. Courses may be either international or national; in any case, they will profit from previous experience and exchange with ongoing efforts in postgraduate training (e.g. in old age psychiatry [1]).

Here we describe an evaluation of the Berlin Summer School “Psychiatry as a Science” as an example of an international course organized on a multilevel basis and adapted to specific target groups. This Summer School has been educating Central and Eastern European young psychiatrists on a yearly base since 2000 and inspired similar schools and courses to be organized on a national level. The summer school started with several aims that have changed over time. At the beginning, a chief aim was to help in bringing together gifted and promising individuals from countries that came out of a terrible war. The orientation towards practical matters was a result of surveys on postgraduate training, descriptions of trainees and experience with the WPA program on professional skills for young psychiatrists. As a result the program combined practical instructions and review of current knowledge in key areas of psychiatry. Most of the course was organized in an interactive manner and the core faculty members were with the students throughout the time of the course.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of training during the Berlin Summer School on the professional development and future activities of the participants. The effect of this training was evaluated with respect to (1) the participants immediately reported satisfaction with the topics and the quality and originality of the presentations, and (2) the long-term effects and implications for the professional career of the participants. In addition, we will present selected personal comments of participants and describe the Eastern European Psychiatric Scientific Initiative (E-EPSI) as an example for a network which was stimulated by the Berlin Summer School. The institutionalization of the Berlin Summer School and the establishment of national summer schools will be discussed.

2. Subjects, material and methods

The Berlin Summer School “Psychiatry as a Science” is organized by the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Campus Charité Mitte, Charité - University Medicine Berlin, in collaboration with the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Science. Introductory First level sessions were held in the summer of 2000 (First Berlin Summer School), 2001 (Second Berlin Summer School), and 2004 (Forth Berlin Summer School) and were based on the following educational objectives:

- to impart professional skills (such as those involved in reading and presenting a scientific paper, designing and improving own research projects, publishing and presenting results of a study, coping with ethical problems etc.) and;

- to update knowledge in key areas of psychiatry (e.g. epidemiology, schizophrenia, affective disorders, addiction, anxiety disorders, sub-threshold disorders etc.).

The topics were presented in highly interactive workshops with a great number of practices and individual tasks.

The participants of both first level sessions of Berlin Summer School were 30 young psychiatrists from Central and Eastern European countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro. Participants either had finished residency or just completed board specialization. They were recommended by national psychiatric associations or international trainees associations. After written application the faculty selected the most promising candidates. The faculty included leading psychiatrists from Germany, India, Switzerland and UK.

A second level course with the most active participants from the First and Second Berlin Summer School was held in 2002 (Third Summer School); because the participants of this second level summer school were identical with participants from the first two summer schools and their ratings may have been influenced by being selected for this second level education, the results of the evaluation of this summer school will not be presented here.

All former participants ($N = 43$) of the Berlin Summer School filled out the evaluation form at the end of each summer school, the presented evaluation was pre-planned. The rate of answers varied between 93.3% in 2000; 86.6% in 2001; 93.3% in 2002 and 100% in 2004. The evaluation form included a list of all topics and questioned whether the participants felt that the respective topic was of interest, how the information was conveyed and whether the participants could find the information elsewhere. The answered of each question was scored between **1** = not at all, **2** = not very much, **3** = OK, **4** = very much and **5** = excellent.

Evaluation of long-term effects was carried out in 2004 with a questionnaire that was sent via e-mail to all former participants (30) of the summer schools in the years 2000–2002. We were unable to contact nine participants because their e-mail address has been changed. The former participants were asked whether the training in Berlin had any long-term implications in their professional activities. The answer was rated 5 = yes, very much; 4 = yes a lot; 3 = yes a little; 2 = not very much; 1 = not at all. In addition, with informed consent we present quotations of former participants.

For statistical comparison of the different topics of the summer school and the two time points (2000 and 2004) a two-factorial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. The different topics were regarded as a within-subjects factor, time was the between-subjects factor. The main and interaction effects of these factors were tested with multivariate criteria such as the Wilks' lambda and its approximated F -value. When significant main or interaction effects were found, univariate F -tests followed in MANOVA for investigating simple effects. The long-term effects of the Berlin Summer School were studied using a MANOVA compar-

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