

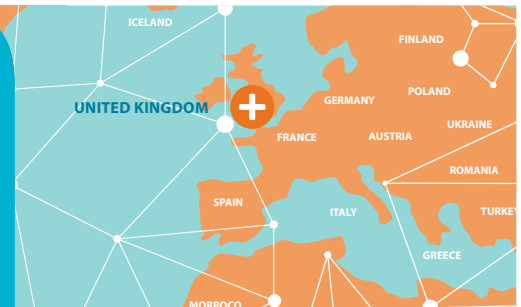
Doctors in Training Grant

PRELIMINARY REPORT

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A very rare sunny day in London, shortly prior to "Lock-down"

Well I know I am not alone when I say 2020 has certainly been an adventure, but not anything like the adventure I originally anticipated! The onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic has called for creativity, resilience and flexibility in the pursuit of work, training and studies. In pursuing my dream to further women's mental health research and awareness this year, I have had to throw my original plans out the window but I have also discovered other opportunities.

Early on in my medical career, I became involved with the Victorian Medical Women's Society, where I had the opportunity to work closely with an incredibly inspiring group of women doctors. This was pivotal in inspiring a passion for both the rights of medical women and women's health. Within this network, I was fortunate to meet an eminent researcher and psychiatrist specialising in women's mental health. Her work and mentorship inspired both my pursuit of psychiatry training and ongoing passion for women's mental health. This is an area that is lacking in research initiatives and care services in Australia, despite having a resonating impact on our society.

After completing the first two years of my psychiatry training, I was offered an opportunity to travel to London and undertake research with the King's College London, Section of Women's Mental Health. The Section of Women's Mental Health aims to conduct research into the gendered determinants of mental health problems, the needs of women with mental health problems using epidemiological and qualitative methods, and to develop and evaluate interventions to meet those needs and inform health policy. I saw this as an incredible opportunity to network internationally, develop my knowledge and research skills and ultimately contribute to a career in women's mental health. I hence took a break in my formal training and took on the voluntary role of Visiting Research Associate for 12 months at Kings College London.

On arriving in London in February, I was impressed by the welcome and hospitality I was shown by the Section of Women's Mental Health and my supervisor Professor Louise Howard. I was invited to Professor Howard's home above Hampstead Heath in the countryside and we excitedly collaborated about projects I could become involved in whilst in London. Professor Howard and the Section of Women's Mental Health turned out to be a gateway to linking in with organisations throughout Europe with a shared passion and advocacy for Women's Mental Health. I soon became part of the Violence, Abuse and Mental Health Network, as well as the European Cost Action Working Group for PPD (Post-partum depression).

One of my first projects was to collaborate with the Cost Action Working Group for PPD in a literature review concerning the existent screening measures of PPD (i.e. what measures exist and which are the most psychometrically robust). This formed part of a series of reviews examining the current assessment procedures for the main players in PPD. These reviews will make an important contribution to the development of guidelines that can help researchers and professionals working in the area of PPD to select appropriate assessment measures.

Whilst in London, I also had the opportunity to take part in exciting professional development opportunities such as training in Mentalisation Based therapy at the renowned Anna Freud Centre. I was thrilled to tour historic locations such as the Freud Museum and attended lectures held at this venue including a series on woman, sexuality and psychoanalysis.



1. Research from Home, the new normal
2. Staying connected and zen whilst working apart – The Section of Women’s Mental Health “Yoga with Jill”

By early March however, it had become clear that the COVID 19 pandemic was going to have a huge impact on our lives, especially in London. The Section for Women’s Mental Health soon began working from home, something that whilst not significantly impacting our ability to collaborate on projects, did severely impact our ability to conduct field research and my original plan to conduct a qualitative study on community perinatal psychiatry services had to be postponed. The Section have been creative in maintaining a sense of connection during these times and I have especially enjoyed being involved in weekly “Coffee Over Zoom” and “Yoga with Jill” (a talented fellow researcher and yogi who is holding regular yoga sessions for the team).

By the end of March, within just a few short weeks, the COVID 19 pandemic had brought London to a stand-still. It soon became obvious that this was not going to be the adventure filled year of travel and experience I had anticipated. Healthcare systems around the world were struggling and I began to feel incredibly isolated and concerned about both my colleagues and vulnerable loved ones back in Australia. Although I knew how important my research was broadly, I began to feel a sense of uselessness, not having a UK medical registration and thus not being able to directly contribute to the overwhelmed healthcare system in London.

It was with great sadness that I made the devastating decision to return to Melbourne and booked one of the last available flights back to Australia. I knew that for my own wellbeing, I needed to support my Australian colleagues and the Australian health system in such a time of need, as well as be closer to my family in this time of crisis. The field of mental health and psychiatry is especially affected at this time and I feel relieved to have been able to resume my role as a psychiatry registrar at home and support my team.

Since returning home, the need for increased support for health care workers has become starkly apparent. I have hence become involved in a number of initiatives to provide connection and access to support for health care workers. This includes the “Hand in Hand” initiative, where I have signed up as a mentor for a group of junior doctors, as well as establishing a Balint group for doctors of all specialities. It has always been apparent to me that in the healthcare industry, in order to provide the best possible care to others, we have to support each other and I am confident that these initiatives will have a flow on effect in benefiting the health and wellbeing of our communities.

All in all, whilst the COVID 19 pandemic has upturned this year for everyone, it has also lead to new opportunities for personal and professional growth and development that I could not have originally anticipated. Travelling to London, even for a short period and establishing ongoing connections with others from around the world passionate about women’s mental health, has been an invaluable experience. This was always going to be a long-term project that I intended to continue and broaden in my work back home in Australia. I am so thankful for the scholarship from MIGA, not only for allowing the travel to London in the first place, but also in allowing me to return safely home so that I can both contribute to the healthcare system here, whilst continuing my research and advocacy for women’s mental health.

Each year MIGA’s Doctors in Training Grants Program offers six Grants of \$10,000 to assist doctors in training whilst pursuing advanced training opportunities. Many different training types are eligible - visit our website to find out more and to apply.

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