

Elective report

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Location: Broadmoor Hospital

During my elective at Broadmoor Hospital I was able to observe how forensic mental health services are delivered in a high security setting. One of my objectives was to learn more about forensic psychiatry in general. The staff at the hospital were very welcoming and were happy to answer any questions that I had. I learnt quite a few things about forensic psychiatry; something that struck me in particular was how lengthy the average stay for patients admitted to high security mental health hospitals was. Secondly, I was also quite struck by how the perception of 'successful treatment' differed amongst psychiatrists in this setting compared to the management of mental illness in non-forensic settings. Psychiatrists in this setting may, for example, see it as a significant improvement if a patient is able to remain sociable in an occupational therapy setting for an hour, as oppose to just half an hour. In a non-forensic settings this would perhaps not strike much of a cord with the caring team.

Furthermore, it was interesting to see how resource intensive the treatment for these patients is. Although multidisciplinary care exists even in the community; it, on at least some accounts, is more intense at Broadmoor. And the fact that multidisciplinary communication exists in a face-to-face format, rather than merely through patient notes, on a daily basis with all members of the team present, I suppose, serves as an example to that effect. Unsurprisingly, risk management is a biggy in forensic psychiatry and I can't describe the insight with which forensic psychiatrists assess this risk as being anything less than very sophisticated. It seems most patients at Broadmoor present with some combination of pschizophrenia and borderline personality disorder.

Another objective of mine was to think about the role of psyhiatry in my career. I am interested in becoming a GP and a larger part of primary care involves dealing with mental illness. This placement has opened my mind as to how limited the GP consultation may be when it comes to assessing an individual for mental illness, and I suppose it is not by chance that the role of the GP is more in management rather than full assessment of a new onset and severe mental health disorder. The GP's role is made significantly easier by the fact that the patients in the community wish to be treated, although that doesn't necessarily equate to compliance.

I was happy to see that there was much going on at Broadmoor in terms of research and education. During my limited time there, I had the pleasure if listening to two internationally renowned scholars. I also witnessed how some consultants who were involved in much research themselves and for some patients who where treatment resistant it was clear to see how their expertise was practically beneficial for the patient. This highlighted to me the importance of keeping up to date with current literature in one's own area of expertise. During my GP placement I was handed a very insightful article to read by my tutor about primary care for patients with mental illness - and coincidentally I had the oppprtunity to meet and spend a day with one of the authors who himself was a GP at Broadmoor, and was very helpful in provding me with career advice. He also highlighted different aspect of a short consultation which allow the GP to categorise the type of consultation they are having the with patient and thus be able to devise a more successful outcome.

My time at Broadmoor unsurprisingly led me to witnessing the barrier between chosing and being forced into treatment. Patients of course do not turn up to Broadmoor by choice and secondly it is still a hospital as opposed to being a prison, all beit a high security one. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the examples of how the patients are generally allowed to eat as mich as they wish despite the negative consequences on their health, whilst they are not always allowed to refuse treatment for their mental disorder - due to the consequences that may arise from that with regards to the safety of others and the safety of the patients themselves.