

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF A FULL-TIME CLERKSHIP IN A PORTUGUESE MEDICAL SCHOOL: A FOCUS ON ATTITUDES AND CAREER CHOICE

M. Xavier<sup>1,2</sup>, P. Mateus<sup>1,2</sup>, J. Caldas Almeida<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mental Health Department, NOVA Lisbon University, <sup>2</sup>Directorate General of Health, Ministério da Saúde, Lisbon, Portugal

**Introduction:** Due to the scarcity of mental health professionals, recruitment of psychiatrists is presently a major issue in Portugal. A negative attitude towards psychiatry or the psychiatrist's role has frequently been observed in rather different countries - this is troublesome, given that medical graduates' attitudes toward psychiatry has been pointed as a predictor of recruitment. On the other side, research suggests that a clerkship may improve the student's attitudes, namely when they are stimulated to participate in the delivery of care.

**Objectives:** To assess the impact of a clerkship in the attitudes toward psychiatry among Portuguese medical graduates, as well as in the motivation to choose psychiatry for future training.

**Methods:** Balon's self-reported questionnaires were administered to all 6<sup>th</sup> year students in a medical school in Lisbon, before and after a 4-weeks full-time psychiatric clerkship.

**Results:** 153 students were evaluated. After the clerkship, perceptions about the overall merits of psychiatry, efficacy, role definition, functioning of psychiatrists and use of legal powers to hospitalize patients were significantly improved. There was also a meaningful increase of trainees considering the possibility to take a residency in psychiatry. However, perceptions of low prestige and negative pressure from family and peers regarding a future choice of psychiatry remained unchanged in about one-third of the students.

**Conclusions:** Clerkship had an auspicious overall impact on the student attitude towards psychiatry, as well as in the number of students considering a future career in psychiatry. Attitudes toward psychiatry seems a promising outcome indicator of the clerkship's quality.