

Should a Reflective Practice Group be introduced for Medical Students on Psychiatry placement in Dumfries and Galloway?

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Introduction

Reflection is a lifelong skill, beginning at medical school and continuing throughout every doctor’s career. Psychiatry poses unique medico-legal, ethical, and psychological challenges. Fourth and Fifth year Medical students attend Midpark Hospital for 4 to 5 week placements throughout the year. For most this is their first exposure to a psychiatric unit.

Project Aims

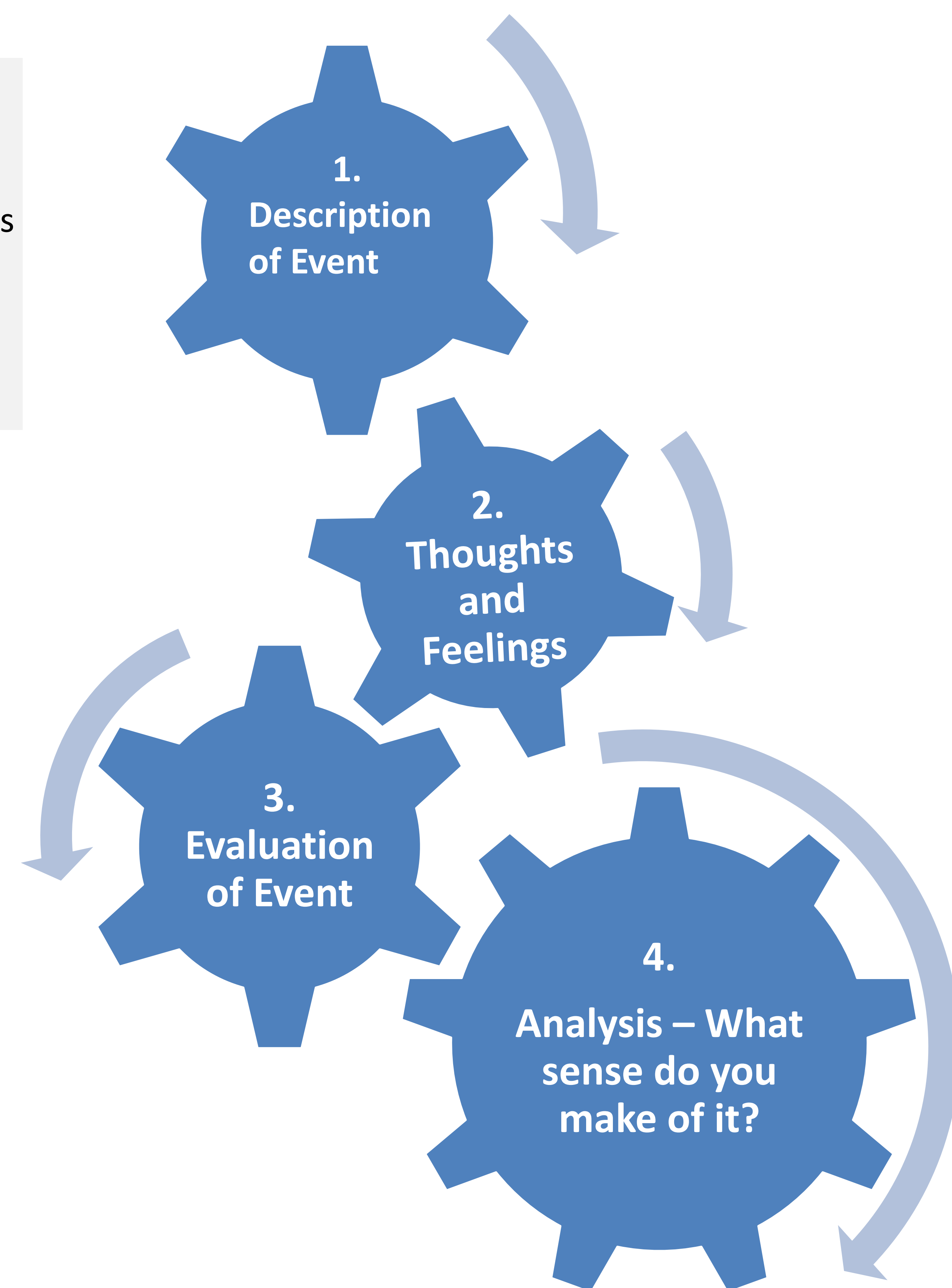
1. To understand medical students’ ideas, expectations and concerns about psychiatry placements.
2. To use weekly reflective practice sessions for students to improve their understanding of reflection, improve their confidence in medical practice, and support them through the challenges during their placement.

Methods

A weekly 1 hour reflective practice group was piloted, facilitated by an experienced Psychiatry trainee. This was based on the reflective ‘Balint group’ which occurs as part of Psychiatry specialist training. At each session, one student reflected on a significant experience. The group then discussed the key issues raised by this reflection. Reflections were structured simply (see graphic) to facilitate understanding and participation. Qualitative feedback on students’ ideas, expectations and apprehensions about the placement, as well as feedback on the reflective group, was collected from 20 students in total.

Results

Ideas about Psychiatry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenging communication• Patients lacking insight• Holistic approach to care• Societal and popular culture stigmatisation of mental health• Legal complexity, use of Mental Health Act• Difficulty to maintain safety, complex risk management
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice psychiatric history taking and mental state examination• Practice communication skills, especially difficult and sensitive questioning• Learn about common psychiatric disorders• Understand the basis for and process of risk assessment
Apprehensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appearing insensitive/causing distress through questioning• Managing patients lacking in insight• Emotional strain from discussing trauma• Personal safety concerns• Lack of prior experience



100% of students understood the purpose of the group and found it useful

The group helped 100% of students to reflect on challenging experiences in Psychiatry

90% of students gained new insights into Psychiatry

90% felt more confident about working in Psychiatry

“Very helpful to have a member of staff to discuss areas of reflection regularly. It sometimes feels like you are on your own with these things and so the group definitely made me feel supported”

“At the start of the rotation I thought it might be a waste of time but it was genuinely really useful and enjoyable. Helps to think deeper about certain issues and confront some of your own thoughts about things”

“Honestly didn’t think this would be useful other than a reflective tick box exercise however actually found it helped me become more confident knowing that others have the same anxieties as me. Thank you!”

Reflection and Conclusion

We have gained insights into preconceptions and anxieties our students have about placements in Psychiatry. Feedback from students demonstrates a range of benefits from the reflective group sessions. The success of the group has led to it becoming a regular component of our undergraduate teaching programme, and feedback from future students will continue to be sought.