

Designing an Elective Psychodynamic Curriculum for Medical Students

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Background: Psychodynamic principles are a foundational aspect of diagnostic and therapeutic techniques in psychiatry. Psychiatry residency programs often integrate the fundamentals of psychodynamics into didactic curriculum for their trainees, and many practicing psychiatrists rely on psychodynamic training in the conduction of psychotherapy as well as acute psychiatric care. For the medical student interested in a career in psychiatry, psychodynamics often exists as a topic of personal study, an opportunity to research independently before beginning residency.

Objectives: Recognizing the deficit in psychodynamic training in current American medical education, we designed a 5-session elective curriculum for psychiatry applicants to improve their understanding and skills in psychodynamics before residency.

Methods: Our coursework included an introduction to psychodynamic formulation, an in-depth review of ego defenses, active listening techniques, developmental history assessments, and a final case presentation. All skills were discussed in group, round-table settings with an attending psychiatrist, and students had the opportunity to both witness and lead their own psychodynamic-focused interviews.

Results: After completion of the fifth session of the course, the student can be considered familiar with the basics of psychodynamics, advanced interviewing skills, and is better equipped to continue their learning in psychiatry residency. The course will remain a staple of UTCOMLS' unique training opportunities available to psychiatry applicants.

Conclusion: Psychodynamic principles are a valuable skill for psychiatric practice. With few examples found in existing literature, psychodynamic curriculum for medical students is an extremely unique and beneficial opportunity for students to enhance their skills before psychiatry residency.

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