



CAREERS
at Eltham College

NHS
South London and Maudsley
NHS Foundation Trust

In May 2022, I and a fellow pupil, who are applying to medical school, were fortunate enough to secure a week's work experience with a Consultant community old age psychiatrist in Croydon. We received the timetable for the week prior to starting which was helpful and was an indication as to what we might expect!

On the first day, we were shown around the unit and introduced to everyone in the team who were really welcoming and helpful. We then were straight into meeting the patients. Most of the patients, as well as having severe psychiatric illness, also have many physical health problems, and the combination of the two means that they cannot leave their homes. As a result, most of the patients that we saw were seen in their own homes. This made the experience more interesting and informative, as we could see how the patient was managing to live and look after themselves. If they were struggling, it was an indication of how their illnesses were affecting their day to day, and quality of life. We were able to ask questions to the patient and also to their family members or carers. Afterwards, we discussed the patient with the Consultant who asked our opinions, asked us questions to explore these further, and then discussed the management of the patient, including medication, practical support for the patient and therapies that might be helpful.

We were also able to go out on visits to see patients with the trainee doctors, and this gave us a different experience of teaching methods, as well as lots of tips on medical school applications! The patients that we saw included patients with severe depression and anxiety, those suffering from schizophrenia and other psychotic illnesses and also patients with significant dementia. The treatment strategies varied greatly between all of the patients that we saw. It was also interesting to learn how their symptoms can be affected by the patients' cultural and religious beliefs. It was very informative to see how the team work together in a multidisciplinary manner, to ensure that all aspects of the patients' care are addressed, including doctors, nurses, occupational therapists and social workers.

We also spent time with the doctor from the Home treatment team. This team see patients in their homes intensively at least once a day and sometimes twice per day. These patients are on the cusp of needing inpatient psychiatric admission, and the Home treatment team can make adjustments to medication very quickly if necessary, monitor their risk, support their families, and hopefully avoid them coming into hospital. We saw a severely psychotic patient who also had distressing symptoms of mania, as well as a depressed patient who was severely neglecting herself and who was not eating adequately. These experiences were fascinating and we gained a real insight into how severely debilitating, psychiatric illnesses can be, and how such patients can often be managed with a lot of support in the community.

We were also able to join a medical outpatient clinic with a doctor in Croydon University hospital seeing elderly patients with complex medical conditions. It was very interesting to get experience in a busy general hospital. Of note, we saw a patient with multiple health problems, requiring a cardiac pacemaker. We were able to see how the need for this procedure was explained to the patient as well as the pros and cons of it, and listen to his fears and anxieties as well as being able to ask him questions ourselves.

The week's experience was fascinating and I saw a wide variety of psychiatric illnesses in the elderly as well as many physical health problems too. It definitely reaffirmed my determination to pursue a medical career!