

# Diary of a (neurotic) first-year clinical trainee

**NATALIE COOK** (now a third-year on the Oxford Clinical Doctoral Course) looks back at the start of her training.

**27 September** One day to go. Am beginning to wish I was on a course which organises for first-years to meet, or tells you a bit about them, or at least gives you their names.

What if everyone else on the course is a complete brainbox and already knows everything about clinical psychology and is only doing the course to prove they already know everything? Am beginning to wonder why I want to do this. There seems to be such a big jump between assistants and trainees. Trainees are expected to know things. What if everyone else knows things already? Hope no one notices I don't know things. Maybe I should act as if I do know — worked at university!

Perhaps should go to the pub for a quick drink to calm my nerves? What if they think I have an alcohol-related problem?

**28 September** Have written 'trainee clinical psychologist' several times now — feels less like a dream. Unsure how I feel though. Brain blown away by being told the structure for next three years — normally a week in advance is about the limit of my planning. Not sure whether the fluttering in my stomach is nerves, excitement or simply the beginnings of hunger pangs.

But the rest of my year seem OK. And we've all decided to go to the pub. (They must all have alcohol-related problems!)

**29 September** Times considered leaving the course: 8. Nightmare role plays. Felt even more nervous than at my interviews (it is possible). Had problems de-rolling (NB remember not to pretend to be afraid of what am afraid of).

Went to football match with trainees (have no friends).

**30 September** Times considered leaving the course: 4

Videoing better than I thought, although awful to see self on screen. Had talk on use of language by patient (i.e. distancing of self). Must remember to be careful how talk about self.

Had anxiety attack/crisis of confidence after lunch and almost gave up to become

a hairdresser. Stuck it out in the end by pretending to know what I was supposed to say (NB practise more). Talked to trainees in pub later and found they felt same way. Agreed to go to pub lots. (They definitely have alcohol-related problems.)

**1 October** Had good day. Discussed CBT formulations. Amazed by fact that have done some of this before. Maybe I do know something. And ended up with trainees in pub. Maybe will cope for three years after all.

**5 October** Belief that should be on course: 8 (out of 100!). Everyone else seems confident and happy to ask questions. Maybe I will be found out soon. Shall have to practise looking confident. Spoke to friend this evening who is currently filling in her form. Am reminded there are some advantages to being on a clinical course.

**6 October** Seminar on race, gender and culture made us all aware that we come from different backgrounds with different experiences and opinions. Talked about myth of people who have no prejudices. Hope they don't think I'm prejudiced.

Met second-years (third-years too stressed to read timetable and come too). They all seem normal. Big relief. All going to second-year party on Saturday — but will meet in pub first for moral support.

**7 October** Belief that should be on course: 50. Wonderful seminar on different approaches to formulation. Felt quite inspired. Occupational health are ill, so rescheduled.

**8 October** Talk on Mental Health Act this afternoon, went through all the different sections. My work in the psychiatric hospital last year suddenly makes much more sense!

**9 October** Anxiety about screwing up someone's life during placement: 97

Pre-placement visit today. Had lie in and tidied up house in attempt not to stress about meeting person who will evaluate my clinical competence. Doing well until got to department and met fellow trainee wearing a suit. Supervisor seems nice and normal.

Resisted urge to ask for annual leave, maybe best done after I start. Been told that will have to tape sessions for supervisor to listen to. Hmm...must learn how to edit bits. Maybe should practise talking too.

**12 October** Good trainee presentation today. Now worried about mine, although isn't till January. Maybe should start reading now. Talk this pm on treating OCD. After each talk I rule out something else don't want to work with. Maybe should be hairdresser.

**13 October** Almost fell asleep five times in morning session. Kept awake by visualising hunky naked man walking into room. Afternoon spent discussing placements. Was fine until started thinking of concerns and worries about things that might go wrong. Now visualising nightmare situations.

**14 October** Study day!

Stopped after read placement requirements as racked with anxiety (NB remember to phone further education college about hairdressing courses).

**15 October** Teaching on professional issues. Got to discuss worries over being sued, working with MDT, emotions, difficult client situations, safety, etc. Hmm...no answers though.

Placement rapidly approaching. Not sure if worried. 4am — decided am terrified

**16 October** Last day of induction Workshop on cognitive assessment. Discussed memory and attention — used small words as brain's very dead (after three weeks of teaching and lots of nights out).

Next week is first proper week of work rather than study. Brain is now fried but looking forward to seeing real people. Off to pub to help cope with fact.

## Induction summary

Times considered career change: 29 (average of 1.9 times per day). Number of evenings out: 13 (includes parties — bonus points) Number of evenings spent doing exercise: 2 (extremely impressive I feel)

Lets hope can continue once start work!