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“We need to be able to create a safe space where we can discuss our mental health issues... because the people are afraid to go to the hospital because of the stigma. We have to start as care providers to create an environment for our patients.”

- SLPTH Resident



Scan QR code for additional reading and to access information about the PIH SLPTH training program

Perspectives on Residency Training and Providing Mental Health and Neurological Care in Sierra Leone

Yesenia Day

BACKGROUND

Sierra Leone has a population of over 8 million people, but only has one mental health facility, three psychiatrists, and no in-country practicing adult neurologists. The Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital (SLPTH), formerly the Kissy Lunatic Asylum, is the oldest psychiatric hospital in sub-Saharan Africa. Recently, SLPTH has transformed to provide more accessible and patient-centered care to the community, becoming chain free in 2018. With support from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) and Partners in Health (PIH), SLPTH received accreditation as the country's first psychiatry residency program in 2022.



Video: The Only Psychiatric Hospital in Sierra Leone

This project consisted of conversations with SLPTH residents on subjects of mutual interest with the hope of gaining valuable insights into the experiences of SLPTH residents while facilitating cultural and medical exchange through bidirectional conversations between SLPTH and UCSF residents.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ To facilitate respectful and collaborative conversations with residents at SLPTH.
- ❖ To explore shared topics of interest, experiences, challenges, and insights related to psychiatry and neurology.
- ❖ To produce a creative writing piece, based on the collected narratives, for submission as an opinion article to a medical journal.

METHODS



REFLECTION

Through this project, I was able to investigate the field of global health narrative medicine by utilizing the power of virtual connectivity. Sharing a virtual room with the SLPTH residents and getting to know their lives, goals, and experiences as healthcare professionals taught me many invaluable lessons about medicine and global health research.

Developing a good rapport and deep connections with the residents over time was very fulfilling. It was inspiring to learn about the residents' commitment to their community and the work they are doing to increase quality and accessibility to care and to decrease stigma surrounding mental illness. Topics discussed included the residents' personal journeys to medicine, community perspectives on mental illness, commonly encountered neuropsychiatric conditions, obstacles to seeking care, and future aspirations for mental health care in Sierra Leone. Ultimately, I hope the final product elevates the perspectives of others and highlights the value of knowledge exchange amongst medical professionals from different backgrounds, even when occurring virtually.