

Diploma/MA in Psychoanalytic Studies



Who's it for?

Any graduate, not necessarily medical, "interested in bridging the gap between the clinical domain of contemporary psychoanalytic practices and the wider intellectual culture." In fact, there were only a couple of doctors on the course.

When did you do it?

I did the taught, seminar part of the course in 1996-8, but I did not submit the dissertation for the degree until 2001 (the maximum delay allowed). The course is on Tuesday afternoons/evenings in term time for two years. In the first year, I was on sabbatical from full time general practice, but it was possible to do the second year while back in practice.

Why did you do it?

I was preparing for the transition from general practice to my next career, as a psychotherapist. It seemed an intellectually stimulating way to begin.

How much effort did it entail?

An important part of the course is infant observation. In their own time, students observe a baby for one hour every week from birth to age 2. Each Tuesday in term time there is one lecture or seminar in psychoanalytic theory and another in its applications. In the third seminar a group of four or five students discuss their infant observations with an experienced tutor. There are three papers to write at the end of each year and a 10 000 word dissertation later. Quite a lot of reading and thinking is required.

Is there an exam?

No. The fee is £2000 (\$3800; €2900) a year. A diploma in psychoanalytic studies is awarded if the candidate does not submit a dissertation.

Top tip

Be prepared to be firm about your choice of dissertation topic. I knew I wanted to write about the psychology of doctors, but initially the course leader was not keen and I had to persist.

Contact for further information

Director of Academic Services, Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, The Tavistock Centre, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA. Tel 0207 447 3722, www.tavi-port.org

Was it worth it?

An emphatic "yes." Experienced tutors led discussion of both the classic literature and contemporary interactions of psychoanalytic ideas in art, drama, and social processes. There is an enormous amount to be learnt from infant observation; I had never looked at a baby, either my own or a patient, in that continuously focused way. It greatly developed my general powers of observation, and I am now much more aware in all consultations. I was able to enter clinical training for psychotherapy feeling I had a good knowledge base. A doctor from any discipline could gain a great deal from this reflective study. ■

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Have you taken a medically related diploma recently? If you think other doctors might like to hear about it, perhaps you could write us a diplomatosis article. Just answer the questions using the format above and send to geaston@bmj.com. We pay £75 for each published article.