

ECNP Research Internship

Time Period:

May 16th to May 27th, 2022

Host: Prof. Dan J. Stein, MD, PhD

SAMRC Unit on Risk and Resilience in Mental Disorders, Department of Psychiatry and Neuroscience Institute, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Intern: Julija Gecaite-Stonciene, PhD candidate

Laboratory of Behavioral Medicine, Neuroscience Institute, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences; Palanga-Kaunas, Lithuania

I am Julija Gecaite-Stonciene, clinical psychologist, psychotherapist and PhD candidate at Lithuanian University of Health Sciences. Recently I have finally completed the ECNP Research Internship at SAMRC Unit on Risk and Resilience in Mental Disorders, Department of Psychiatry and Neuroscience Institute, University of Cape Town. The internship was mentored by renowned professor dr. Dan. J. Stein. This research internship was initially planned for 2020/2021, yet the world faced tremendous challenges caused by COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this, the internship was completed only 2 years later, in May 2022.

Nevertheless, I was fortunate to start the collaboration online much earlier than face-to-face internship took place. Before coming to South Africa, I had a chance to learn and be mentored by prof. Dan J. Stein for whom I am very thankful. As a result, a scientific paper titled „Obsessive-Compulsive (Anankastic) Personality Disorder in the ICD-11: A Scoping Review“ was published in 2021. In addition, a systematic review on pharmacotherapy for obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) was completed in 2021-2022 that led to a preparation of another manuscript.

During these two weeks, I was introduced to various scientific activities that took place in both University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University. I spent some time at Cape Universities Body Imaging Centre (CUBIC) and had an opportunity to learn about the recruitment process of individuals with and without obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). I have observed MRI scanning as well as assessment of cognitive functions for the research purposes, which gave me a better insight on planning and procedures of research activities in South Africa. Additionally, I had a chance to participate in Webinar for South African mental health practitioners regarding the recent changes in DSM-5-TR.



Besides, I had exceptional opportunity to collaborate with prof. Christine Lochner, who invited me to several ongoing scientific investigations as well as introduced to a public journal "Mental Health Matters" for South African doctors and mental health practitioners. During the internship, we co-wrote the article "OCD vs. OCPD: When One Letter Makes a World of Difference". I was also introduced to the director of Mental Health Information Centre at University of Stellenbosch Janine Roos, who has informed me about the current mental health situation in South Africa, its availability, quality, and the most common mental health issues faced in the country. All these activities have deepened my knowledge not only as a young researcher but also as practicing clinical psychologist and psychotherapist.

In addition, unexpectedly I was also introduced and invited to the ongoing research project on Schema therapy that was led by a world known researchers in this area, including prof. dr. Arnoud Arntz. As a psychotherapist in CBT and Schema therapy, this was unanticipated, yet personally meaningful opportunity to merge my academic and clinical interests.

One of the most important reasons to apply for ECNP Research Internship was an opportunity to meet and learn from the best and establish the possibilities for long-term collaborations. However, this internship opportunity was way beyond my expectations for which I am exceptionally grateful for prof. Dan J. Stein, prof. Christine Lochner and their team members as well as ECNP Educational Committee.