

FIVE QUESTIONS TO LUIS ALAMEDA



Luis Alameda studied medicine in Spain, Switzerland and Sweden, undertaking his FMH in psychiatry and psychotherapy—awarded by the Swiss Medical Association—from 2009 to 2016 at Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV). It was while at CHUV that Luis Alameda was awarded the SYNAPSY clinician-scientist scholarship (2012–2013), securing a half-time research position in the laboratory of Professor Kim Do and pursuing his training as a psychiatrist in the Minkowski service, (focused on schizophrenia spectrum disorders). During the following years Luis Alameda investigated the links between child abuse and psychosis and finished his training as a psychiatrist as a clinic leader at the CHUV liaison psychiatry service. He succeeded in completing his doctorate in medicine (MD) and was awarded the biology and medicine prize at the University of Lausanne in 2015.

What are you studying at the moment?

I'm interested in the impact of psychological trauma on the development of psychoses. I'm also exploring the biological markers of these pathologies. I have been exploring different aspects in this field in a cohort of early psychosis patients recruited from the Tipp (Treatment and Early Intervention in Psychosis) Program in Lausanne. I joined the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College in London in the summer of 2017 thanks to an Early Postdoc Mobility scholarship awarded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. I'm continuing my research theme at King's by focusing on epigenetic biomarkers related to trauma exposure in patients suffering from psychosis.

Where does your interest in psychiatry come from?

It's clearly the people who suffer from psychosis that have led me in the direction of psychiatry. They are fragile and touching at the same time, two characteristics which made me want to have a better understanding of them. I have always paid close

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attention to these individuals; even while at primary school, I was the only one of my classmates who didn't rebuff the "odd balls" in the class. Somehow I wanted them to be able to be like everyone else, and I wanted to extend the hand of friendship. I think it's extremely important to help these individuals, as seeing someone lose their faculties little by little is totally disconcerting. Taken together, this certainly contributed to fostering my intellectual interest in psychosis. Then, during the early years of my career, I had the chance to work with Prof. Philippe Conus in the Minkowski service, and this clinical experience confirmed my desire to specialize in this field of psychiatry.

How should the psychiatry of tomorrow develop?

With primary and secondary prevention and with the individualization of treatments. To this end, there is a need for a better understanding of the biological mechanisms leading to diseases, and of a better identification of subgroups of patients with specific needs.

What are your career ambitions?

After my stay at King's College, I'd like to be able to go back to the CHUV psychiatry department, particularly to the Minkowski service, in order to pursue a personal research line with a cohort of patients focusing on the genetic and environmental interactions leading to psychosis. I would like to contribute to a better psychotherapeutic approach for psychotic patients that have been exposed to severe trauma. It's important for me to be able to continue research, in parallel with the clinical practice, because it is another way of helping patients whilst staying in contact with them through the clinic.

How has the SYNAPSY grant helped you?

It has allowed me to start my research career and publish my first articles, which is crucial for gaining research credibility. The financial and logistical aspects of carrying out clinical and research simultaneously are very problematic, and the SYNAPSY grant alleviated these problems enormously. It also allowed me to be involved in a translational laboratory with Prof. Kim Do, which gave me a great background on the biological basis of mental diseases.

*Interview by Yann Bernardinelli – April 2017
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