

Journeys in Practice - Sharing our stories

Dr. Dheeraj Chaudhary



1. What first inspired you to pursue a career in neurodevelopmental psychiatry, and at what point did you know this was the specialty for you?

Since my medical school days, I was drawn to the intersection of brain, behaviour, and development. During early psychiatry training, I found neurodevelopmental conditions and the way they shape cognition, emotion, and social interaction, both intellectually stimulating and clinically fascinating. I realised how meaningful it could be to help individuals with ADHD, autism, and related conditions navigate challenges and reach their potential.

I trained for a year in higher specialist training (ST4) in CAMHS, where I particularly enjoyed my weekly ADHD clinic. Later during forensic psychiatry training, I observed how accurate diagnosis and effective treatment could reduce lengths of stay in prison or the use of segregation. These experiences helped seek a role for myself within neurodevelopmental psychiatry.

2. Can you briefly tell us about the key stages of your training journey , from medical school to consultancy, and the moments that shaped your professional direction?

That is a real trip down memory lane! My journey began in medical school, where we were taught the foundations of clinical reasoning and patient-centred care. During core psychiatry training, I gravitated toward roles involving ADHD and autism assessments, which helped me develop both diagnostic and therapeutic skills. Subspecialty training then allowed me to integrate neurodevelopmental expertise with adult mental health.

I think the key moments that shaped my professional direction included developing an early interest in the field, observing first hand the difference that targeted interventions can make, attending conferences on neurodevelopmental psychiatry, and the excitement of being one of the early starters in this growing area of practice.

3. Neurodevelopmental psychiatry is a field full of complexity and nuance. What aspects of the work drew you in and continue to motivate you today?

Neurodevelopmental psychiatry is indeed highly complex, and that is where the value of training, experience, peer expertise, and lifelong learning becomes clear. What motivates me most is the challenge of solving clinical complexity, the real-world impact of our work, the opportunity to lead peers, and the inherently rewarding nature of the work itself.

Every patient presents a unique profile of strengths, vulnerabilities, and environmental influences, which makes the work intellectually stimulating. At the same time, helping someone with ADHD or autism gain clarity, access appropriate support, and improve their quality of life is profoundly rewarding. The field also allows me to work collaboratively with families, educators, and other professionals, reflecting my belief in relational and personalised care.

4. Every journey has its challenges. What were some of the major barriers you faced, whether personal, systemic, or clinical and how did you navigate them?

Challenges have included balancing complex clinical demands with systemic pressures and service limitations, particularly ensuring timely assessments and follow-up. Clinically, managing comorbidities and engaging patients with multifaceted needs has required adaptability, continuous learning, and the development of a relational, reflective style of practice. I have navigated these challenges through careful prioritisation, collaboration with multidisciplinary teams, seeking mentorship, and maintaining focus on meaningful outcomes for patients. Developing resilience and problem-solving skills through experience has also been essential.

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5. On the flip side, what have been the most rewarding or affirming parts of your career so far?

Thankfully there have been many, when patients write to thank you for changing their life, there is no greater reinforcer, seeing patients thrive following structured assessments and personalised interventions. Feedback from families that a diagnosis or management plan has improved daily life is deeply affirming. Contributing to workshops, training sessions, and quality improvement initiatives has allowed me to extend my impact beyond individual consultations. Being part of positive change, both for patients and services, remains a powerful motivator for me.

6. How has the field changed since you began your training, and what developments excite you for the future of neurodevelopmental care?

The landscape has improved significantly. When I trained, and it has been a few years, there was no formal training in neurodevelopmental psychiatry and no departments dedicated to this specialty. Now, I hear residents receiving training in the field, and there are recognised experts and specialist departments. Over the past five years, since I began raising awareness through social media and talks, adult ADHD and autism, which were previously only partially recognised, are now discussed openly and more widely understood. The field has fortunately become more structured, evidence-based, and recognised across the lifespan. Adult neurodevelopmental needs are increasingly acknowledged, and early interventions are gaining prominence.

Looking ahead, I am excited by the potential for digital tools, personalised care models, and collaborative approaches to improve outcomes. The integration of neurobiological insights with patient-centred care promises a more precise and effective approach to treatment. While challenges such as extended waiting lists remain, it is heartening to see the national effort and focus on reducing these barriers.

7. For trainees or junior doctors considering this specialty, what advice or message would you most want to share with them?

Be curious, attend talks, read widely, and gain experience under supervision. Neurodevelopmental psychiatry requires detailed assessment, the ability to understand complex presentations, and a willingness to learn from multidisciplinary teams. Consultants are usually happy to support requests to shadow, sit in on clinics, or discuss cases, never hesitate to ask nicely! Seek mentorship, embrace continuous learning, and recognise that even small interventions can have a profound impact. The work is challenging but deeply rewarding, offering the opportunity to make meaningful differences in patients' lives.

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8. Looking back, is there anything you would tell your younger self as you embarked on this path?

Lots, hindsight is always beautiful! I would tell my younger self to trust the journey, be patient with learning, and embrace curiosity. Focus on building a network and peer groups, as these relationships will guide your entire career. Take opportunities that excite you, as they often become defining moments in professional growth. No question is ever too small, be brave and ask. make sure that you enjoy the journey.

Most importantly, remember that a meaningful career is built gradually, through persistence, reflection, and collaboration. Take informed risks, be reassured that your being supervised, and there is no other time in your career when you can be freer to make mistakes. Trust the process. Enjoy working with other juniors, build strong links within the MDT, and learn from everyone around you. Keep an open mind and embrace every opportunity to grow.

**Dr. Dheeraj Chaudhary**

Dr Dheeraj Chaudhary is a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist with Priory Healthcare and the founder of a specialist private Neurodevelopmental Psychiatry service. His clinical interests span ADHD, Autism, and complex neurodevelopmental presentations across secure settings, community services, and private healthcare.

Dr Chaudhary is committed to advancing understanding of Neurodevelopmental Disorders and has delivered extensive teaching on ADHD to multidisciplinary professionals. He has contributed to professional development through lectures, workshops, and presentations at events organised by RCPsych, Andrew Sims Centre courses, and other educational forums.

Alongside his clinical work, Dr Chaudhary leverages social media to widen access to high-quality education for general public. He hosts a widely followed series of LinkedIn Live sessions on Neurodivergence, with the aim of making specialist knowledge clear, practical, and accessible for patients, families, and professionals.

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