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The Early Mid-Career Committee (EMCC) of the International Society for Bipolar Disorders: Aspirations and Goals

Running Title: ISBD EMCC Aspirations and Goals

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In 2021, the International Society for Bipolar Disorders (ISBD) launched a new global initiative to support researchers and clinicians specializing in bipolar disorder who are still in the process of establishing their careers. To capture the needs of this group, an Early and Mid-Career Committee (EMCC) was formed and tasked with the development of activities and initiatives to address this objective. To this end, the committee conducted a needs assessment survey in early 2022 that was distributed and completed worldwide. This paper, authored by members of the committee, outlines the rationale, process, goals, and aspirations of the EMCC, and summarizes the development of the needs survey.

International Society for Bipolar Disorders' Early and Mid-Career Committee

The ISBD has a long history of supporting early and mid-career (EMC) researchers and clinicians working in the field of bipolar disorder. For example, the Samuel Gershon Junior Investigator Awards, an initiative dating back more than 15 years, has supported the research of up-and-coming researchers worldwide. Over the years, the ISBD has also provided conference travel fellowships with mentorship opportunities on an *ad-hoc* basis. In a similar vein, ISBD supported the first-ever EMC networking event at the 2019 Sydney Conference, hosted by the Australasian chapter of the Society. It is in this context that the ISBD formed the EMCC in 2020 with the support of ISBD President, Professor Gin Malhi, and ISBD Vice President for Outreach, Professor Erin Michalak.¹

An international call was launched to recruit members to the EMCC. From this, researchers and clinicians from across the globe and career spectrum (PhD to Associate Professor) were selected to optimize representation. Two committee chairs (co-chairs) were appointed to lead the EMCC from its launch and beyond; Dr. Georgina Hosang (mid-career researcher from the UK) and Dr. Ni Xu (early career academic clinician from China). The different geographic locations, research sub-foci, and career stages of these co-chairs, highlight the diversity of member profiles encompassed within the EMCC. Current members of the EMCC include: *Australia*: Dr. Olivia Dean and Dr. Tamsyn Van Rheenen; *Brazil*: Dr. Ives Passos; *Canada*: Dr. Fabiano A. Gomes, Dr. Ishrat Husain, Dr. Rachel Hana Mitchell, and Dr. Emma Morton; *China*: Dr. Ni Xu; *Mexico*: Dr. Joanna Jimenez; *New Zealand*: Dr. Katie Douglas; *Spain and Italy*: Dr. Norma Verdolini; *Uganda*: Dr. Lucas Anyayo; *United Kingdom*: Dr. Georgina Hosang; *United States*: Dr. Gabriel Fries, Dr. Danella Hafeman, Dr. Rebekah Huber, Dr. Neelima Kunam, and Dr. Sarah Sperry.

Early and Mid-Career Committee's Goal

The overarching purpose of the EMCC is to nurture and support the career development of the next generation of clinicians and researchers specializing in **bipolar disorder** and related conditions. Bipolar disorder is recognized by the World Health Organization as one of the leading causes of years lost to disability, affecting over 40 million people in 2019.² In order for research and clinical service output to match the needs in the community, EMC individuals working in bipolar disorder must be retained and appropriately supported.³ ISBD acknowledges EMC members as a strategic asset of the organization and recognizes that there are specific challenges faced by them, such as securing research grants and academic positions focused on bipolar disorder.

From the outset, the ISBD has encouraged the EMCC to be ambitious and bold with their ideas and plans. This has fueled the development of a number of exciting and potentially transformative initiatives. These initiatives will be driven and structured by the results of the needs assessment survey. The development of this survey is outlined below.

Needs Assessment Survey Development

In order to make changes for EMC researchers and clinicians working in the field of bipolar disorder, the EMCC noted that a deeper understanding of EMC needs was required. Thus, one of the first priorities that emerged from the inaugural EMCC meeting was the formation of a smaller working group, the EMCC Needs Assessment Workgroup, dedicated to conducting a global needs assessment survey of EMC researchers, clinicians, and students/trainees in the field of bipolar disorder.

A needs assessment survey is designed to enquire about the most important needs or barriers to success in a particular community⁴. The overall goals of the EMCC needs assessment survey were to i) identify the facilitators of, and barriers against, career progression that were experienced by EMC individuals from across the globe, and ii) to identify professional and career development needs of EMC individuals. The survey was designed to enable responses from a diverse array of individuals at different stages during the first half of their career, with diverse positions, efforts, and responsibilities – all of which directly impact the lives of individuals living with bipolar disorder. The outcomes of the survey were expected to serve as a framework for future activities that the ISBD could facilitate in resourcing. Members of the EMCC Needs Assessment Workgroup determined domains which covered the primary academic roles of researchers, clinicians, and students/trainees early in their career. After a review of relevant literature, eight key domains for the survey were selected by the workgroup (Table 1).

The EMCC Needs Assessment Workgroup members developed multiple qualitative and quantitative questions across each of these domains for a full draft of the survey. Then, through an iterative and collaborative process, final items were determined to balance survey length with the granularity of information collected. All EMCC members were asked to provide feedback on the survey content and questions, and the final survey was piloted with a small number of individuals to ensure questions were accurately programmed and that the survey branching logic was functioning properly.

Survey Dissemination

The final survey was implemented using Qualtrics software, and took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete online. It was shared through Twitter posts and other social media platforms, as well as EMC-relevant communities and websites and via the international networks of the EMCC members. Further promotion occurred at the ISBD 2022 Conference.⁵ In order to maximize outreach, the survey was made available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Chinese. Responses were reviewed and efforts were made to target distribution and recruitment to underrepresented areas. EMCC members made additional outreach efforts and invited individuals from underrepresented countries to participate in the survey. The survey was available for completion from 16 May 2022 to 15 August 2022.

Anticipated Survey Outcomes

The EMCC received 441 responses from 43 countries and regions. The key findings from the survey will be published in articles in the coming months. Results will provide the ability to plan for future action by developing programming and efforts to reduce barriers to the success of EMC individuals based on real data collected from the precise demographic the EMCC intends to support. Through this approach, the EMCC can set short- and long-term priorities based on the results of this survey. For example, there may be barriers that can be addressed immediately (e.g., mentorship workshop at the annual conference), whereas other barriers may be more systematic (e.g., limitations of grant funding) and take time, resources, and collaboration to work towards. Results of the survey may also help to inform mentors, training

program leaders, and funding agencies about the challenges faced by EMC individuals in bipolar disorders.

Summary

The recent formation of the EMCC within the ISBD has led to a number of initiatives to help support EMC researchers and clinicians working in the field of bipolar disorder. The EMCC Needs Assessment Survey, completed by 441 individuals worldwide, will inform these initiatives by providing rich data on challenges faced by EMC individuals in the area of bipolar disorder, and importantly, possible solutions that the ISBD could feasibly offer. Maximizing effective and continued support to upcoming EMC researchers and clinicians will ensure increasing understanding and progress in treatment strategies for the millions of people affected by bipolar disorder worldwide.

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Disclosures

The authors of this study do not have any potential conflicts of interests in connection with this manuscript to declare.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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Table 1: Key Domains Assessed by Needs Survey

Domain	Example(s)
Navigating transitional points	Challenges faced when applying to doctoral programs, postdoctoral fellowships, and/or assistant professorships
Creating and fostering mentorship	Challenges faced with receiving and/or providing mentorship
Research activities	Confidence in securing grant funding and publishing research
Raising academic profile	Ways to maximize academic profile and platforms considered useful in sharing scholarly work
Clinical-research balance	Challenges with maintaining a balance and prioritizing research
Networking and collaboration	Establishing and maintaining productive collaborations
Community engagement	Involvement with the public community to reduce stigma, increase awareness, or reduce health disparities
Work-life balance	Challenges in maintaining research productivity for caregivers. Navigating career disruptions (e.g., parental leave, part time work)