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Mental Health of Medical Students Regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Mental Health of Medical Students regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Image received from the National Alliance on Mental Illness.³²

Purpose

Goal: To inspect the different factors associated with the prevalence of mental health illnesses within medical students and how the COVID-19 pandemic has further heightened and intensified those factors to elucidate the need for more mental health support in this population.

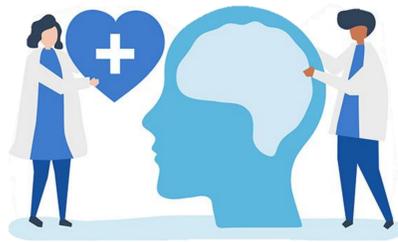


Image received from the John Hopkins School of Medicine.³¹

Abstract

- Mental health has taken a global priority as more realize that it is just as important as physical health in the overall health of a person.
- Medical students have faced mental health issues for decades and have been shown to suffer more than the general population. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has only deteriorated this issue.
- Many primary databases such as PubMed were used.
- The results indicate that medical students have extremely high rates of depression, burnout, anxiety, and stress that can affect their education but also carry over into their professions.
- Although many interventions increase mental wellness in medical school, future studies should focus more on how medical schools can implement these changes into their curriculums.

Introduction

- Mental health refers to a wide range of conditions and disorders that affect mood, thinking, and behavior.¹ Mental health in medical students has always been an area of concern as many feel that mental health in this pool is still not properly supported.
- This issue has only been exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. This study has examined mental health in medical students in studies dated from 2013-2023.
- This study was designed in order to first address the prevalence of mental health issues in this population and then showcase the need for change within medical schools to provide more support for its students.

Methods

Review

- The literature review was conducted using search terms such as “COVID-19 medical student wellness”, “medical student mental health”, “COVID-19 mental health”, “mental wellness coping strategies”. No study type was excluded.
- Participants included medical students that are not restricted by age or by geographical specifications.
- Extracted data was analyzed to find the most prevalent trends.

Survey

- A branching logic survey was created which included the PHQ-9 survey, COVID-19 Exposure and Family Impact Scale (CEFIS) survey, as well as an in-house survey. This survey was created and delivered on Rowan-SOM Qualtrics and included various question types. Alternate consent and recruitment of the participants was all conducted as per IRB protocol.

Results

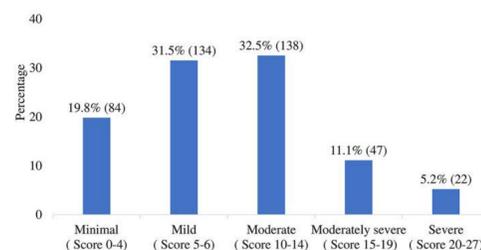


Figure 1. Bar graph showing the severity of depression for medical students through a categorization of PHQ-9 scores obtained by categorizing PHQ-9 scores (average score of 9.5 ± 5.4 and median of 9.0).⁴

- Rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are higher in medical students than those in the general population.¹⁰ This prevalence has only worsened as a result of the pandemic.

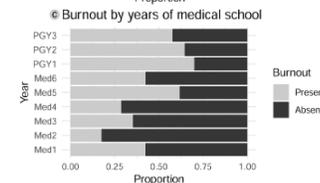
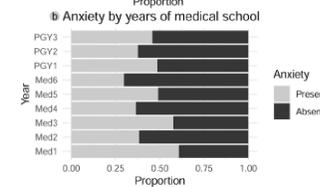
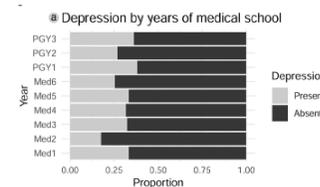


Figure 2. Bar graphs on depression (a), anxiety (b), and burnout (c) in comparison to the year of training.³

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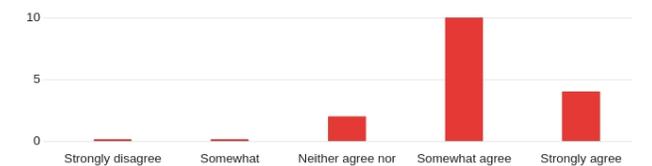


Figure 3. Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your mental health?

Discussion

- Although many expressed concerns over their mental health, many students chose to not communicate their concerns or come out and seek for help.^{9,28}
- In medical school, medical students are taught to value both a patient’s physical and mental health, however, these same students fail to acknowledge their own mental health due to the stigma surrounding it.
- Medical students also do not report mental health concerns to anyone because they do not want to be making claims that others might view as an excuse to work or study.²⁸
- Others, feel that if they do report their mental health concerns, some might think they are unable or unfit to practice as a doctor.
- Many interventions have been shown to be successful through investigation such as pass/fail grading, mental health programs, mind-body skill programs, curriculum structure, multicomponent program reform, wellness programs, as well as advising or mentoring programs.
- The results of the survey indicate students believe that mental health is very important but feel that society and Rowan SOM could do more to help them feel supported.

Conclusion

- The analysis of this study can lead to the potential implementation of new trainings or changes in the curriculum throughout all medical schools so that the mental health of medical students can be improved. This rising awareness in the mental wellbeing of medical students is an important steppingstone in order to now step forward and develop changes and improvements.
- It is very important to define, assess, and then re-assess till perfection a methodology to deal with student wellness to allow students to prosper academically and mentally within their medical school and ultimately their professional lives as physicians.

References

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