

Mandatory Wellness Assessments for Medical Students at the University of Ottawa

Authors : Haykal. Kay-Anne

Abstract : The health and well-being of students is a priority for the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Ottawa. The demands of medical studies are extreme, and many studies confirm that the prevalence of psychological distress is very high among medical students and that it is higher than that of the general population of the same age. The main goal is to identify risk factors for mental health among medical students at the University of Ottawa. The secondary objectives are to determine the variation of these risk factors according to demographic variables, as well as to determine if there is a change in the mental health of students during the 1st and 3rd years of their study. Medical students have a mandatory first and third-year wellness check meeting. This assessment includes a questionnaire on demographic information, mental health, and risk factors such as physical health, sleep, social support, financial stress, education and career, stress and drug use and/or alcohol. Student responses were converted to numerical values and analyzed statistically. The results show that 61% of the variation in the mean of the mental health score is explained by the following risk factors ($R^2 = 0.61$, $F(9.396) = 67.197$, $p < 0.01$): lack of sleep and fatigue ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$), lack of social support ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.001$), poor study or career development ($\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.001$) and an increase stress and drug and alcohol use ($\beta = -0.239$, $p < 0.001$). No demographic variable has a significant effect on the presence of risk factors. In addition, fixed-effects regression demonstrated significantly lower mental health ($p < 0.1$) among first-year students ($M = 0.587$, $SD = 0.072$) than among third-year students ($M = 0.719$, $SD = 0.071$). This preliminary study indicates the need to continue data collection and analysis to increase the significance of the study results. As risk factors are present at the beginning of medical studies, it is important to offer resources to students very early in their medical studies and to have close monitoring and supervision.

Keywords : assessment of mental health, medical students, risk factors for mental health, wellness assessment

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