

Stress and Distress among Physician Trainees: A Wellbeing Workshop

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Abstract : Introduction: Doctors experience high levels of burnout, stress and psychiatric morbidity. This can affect the health of the doctor and impact patient care. Study Aims: To evaluate the effectiveness of a workshop intervention to promote wellbeing for Australian Physician Trainees. Methods: A workshop was developed in consultation with specialist clinicians to promote health and wellbeing for physician trainees. The workshop objectives were to improve participant understanding about factors affecting their health and wellbeing, to outline strategies on how to improve health and wellbeing and to encourage participants to apply these strategies in their own lives. There was a focus on building resilience and developing long term healthy behaviours as part of the physician trainee daily lifestyle. Trainees had the opportunity to learn practical strategies for stress management, gain insight into their behaviour and take steps to improve their health and wellbeing. The workshop also identified resources and support systems available to trainees. The workshop duration was four and a half hours including a thirty- minute meal break where a catered meal was provided for the trainees. Workshop evaluations were conducted at the end of the workshop. Sixty-seven physician trainees from Adult Medicine and Paediatric training programs in Sydney Australia were randomised into intervention and control groups. The intervention group attended a workshop facilitated by specialist clinicians and the control group did not. Baseline and post intervention measurements were taken for both groups to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the workshop. Forty-six participants completed all three measurements (69%). Demographic, personal and self-reported data regarding work/life patterns was collected. Outcome measures include Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS), Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) and Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT). Results: The workshop was well received by the physician trainees and workshop evaluations showed that the majority of trainees strongly agree or agree that the training was relevant to their needs (96%) and met their expectations (92%). All trainees strongly agree or agree that they would recommend the workshop to their medical colleagues. In comparison to the control group we observed a reduction in alcohol use, depression and burnout but an increase in stress, anxiety and secondary traumatic stress in the intervention group, at the primary endpoint measured at 6 months. However, none of these differences reached statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). Discussion: Although the study did not reach statistical significance, the workshop may be beneficial to physician trainees. Trainees had the opportunity to share ideas, gain insight into their own behaviour, learn practical strategies for stress management and discuss approach to work, life and self-care. The workshop discussions enabled trainees to share their experiences in a supported environment where they learned that other trainees experienced stress and burnout and they were not alone in needing to acquire successful coping mechanisms and stress management strategies. Conclusion: These findings suggest that physician trainees are a vulnerable group who may benefit from initiatives that promote wellbeing and from a more supportive work environment.

Keywords : doctors' health, physician burnout, physician resilience, wellbeing workshop

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