Medical Student Mental Health: Challenges and Opportunities

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Disclosures

I have no financial disclosures to make.
The Health Care Setting

A Grim Picture
The Health Care Setting

A Grim Picture

Medical students
    Depression rate 27%
    Anxiety and burnout in more than half
The Health Care Setting

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Medical students
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Residents
  Burnout 60-75% and higher
The Health Care Setting

Medical students
  Depression rate 27%
  Anxiety and burnout in more than half
Residents
  Burnout 60-75% and higher
Physicians
  Burnout rate 54% and rising
  Highest suicide rate of any profession
So what’s being done to address this?
So what’s being done to address this?

Not enough
## Saint Louis University Medical Student Mental Health

### Moderate- Severe Symptoms of Depression (% of class)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Orient.</th>
<th>MS1 (EOY)</th>
<th>MS2 (EOY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2011</td>
<td>6</td>
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**Saint Louis University Medical Student Mental Health**

**Moderate- Severe Symptoms of Anxiety (% of class)**

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A Simple Model

Reduce unnecessary stressors and enhance the learning environment
A Simple Model

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Increase students’ ability to deal with stress
A Simple Model

Reduce unnecessary stressors and enhance the learning environment

Increase students’ ability to deal with stress

Help students find meaning in their work
The Interventions
2009- Pass/ Fail grading in 1st two years, cut curriculum by 10%, instituted longitudinal electives and theme-based learning communities
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2013- Restructured the four year curriculum to allow early start and end to the 3rd year

2014- Confidential tracking of depression and anxiety

2015- Focused support of 2nd years in run-up to Step 1
## Mental Health Impact

Moderate- Severe Symptoms of Depression (% of class)

<table>
<thead>
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<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2018</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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## Mental Health Impact

### Moderate- Severe Symptoms of Anxiety (% of class)

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2018</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## External Bench-Marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AAMC Year 2 Questionnaire</th>
<th>Emotional Climate</th>
<th>Student-fac. interaction</th>
<th>Quality of life</th>
<th>Perceived stress</th>
<th>Disengagement</th>
<th>Exhaustion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>SLU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
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SLU students report getting ½ hour more of sleep per night and spending 1 ½ hour less time in class or studying per day than the average medical student.
But what happened to academic performance???
## Impact

### USMLE Step 1 performance

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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Failure rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Classes of 2011 and 2012</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2018</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>2%</td>
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How could this happen???
The Yerkes-Dodson Curve
What is Needed
What is Needed
What is Needed

We need to improve the academic environment in the pre-clerkship years.
In the clinical years, we need to work on enhancing the well-being of faculty and residents.
Other Drivers of Poor Mental Health
Other Drivers of Poor Mental Health
Problematic Mindsets
Problematic Mindsets

Comparison
Problematic Mindsets

Comparison
Seeing performance as identity
Problematic Mindsets

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Personalization and self-blame
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- Maladaptive perfectionism
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Problematic Mindsets

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- Stanford Duck
Problematic Mindsets

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- Stanford Duck
- Chasing success
Problematic Mindsets

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Imposter phenomenon
Stanford Duck
Chasing success
Stigma around seeking care for mental health problems
How to Address the Mindsets
How to Address the Mindsets

Teach cognitive behavioral techniques to first-year students
Academic Achievement Before Medical School
Academic Achievement in Medical School

![Bell Curve](image)

- 13.6%
- 34.1%
- 34.1%
- 13.6%

The distribution shows that most students achieve an academic performance within 1σ of the mean, with a smaller percentage achieving performance within 2σ and 3σ.
Beyond Curriculum to Culture
Students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the Office of the Dean for Curricular Affairs on accessibility, awareness of student concerns, and responsiveness to student problems.

(5-point Likert scale from very satisfied to very dissatisfied)
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(5-point Likert scale from very satisfied to very dissatisfied)

Nationally- 32.8% very satisfied
SLU- 76.1% very satisfied
Satisfaction with programs/activities that promote effective stress management, a balanced lifestyle, and overall well-being.
Satisfaction with programs/activities that promote effective stress management, a balanced lifestyle, and overall well-being.

Nationally - 33.3% very satisfied
SLU - 81.2% very satisfied
Agreement with statement “My medical school has done a good job of fostering and nurturing my development as a person.”

(5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree)
Beyond Curriculum to Culture

AAMC Graduation Questionnaire

Agreement with statement “My medical school has done a good job of fostering and nurturing my development as a person.”

(5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Nationally- 33.8% strongly agree
SLU- 65.0% strongly agree
If we take man as he is, we make him worse, but if we take man as he should be, we make him capable of becoming what he can be.

Viktor Frankl
The Importance of Meaning
There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one’s life.
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There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche, “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.”