How can academic educators rethink teaching and learning to better support student wellbeing?

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Associate Dean for Curriculum
Professor of Pediatrics
Saint Louis University School of Medicine
Mental Health of Medical Students in the US: A Somewhat Grim Picture
Mental Health of Medical Students in the US: A Somewhat Grim Picture

Depression rates 20-30%
Anxiety and burnout rates greater than 50%
Suicidal ideation rate 11%
Saint Louis University Medical Student
Mental Health
Saint Louis University Medical Student Mental Health

Moderate- Severe Depression Symptoms (Percent of Class) at end of year

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<thead>
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## Saint Louis University Medical Student Mental Health

### Moderate- Severe Anxiety Symptoms (Percent of Class) at end of year

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The SLU SOM Medical Student Mental Health Initiative
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Designed to reduce unnecessary stressors, help students find meaning in their work, and increase students’ ability to deal with stress
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Changes implemented over the past seven years- were guided by students’ perceptions of stressors and were evidence-based whenever possible
The SLU SOM Medical Student Mental Health Initiative

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Changes implemented over the past seven years
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2012 - Change to “true” pass/fail in first two years
2014 - Confidential tracking of depression and anxiety
2015 - Focused support of second year students facing their national board exam
## Impact of Curricular Changes in Years 1 and 2

Moderate- Severe Depression Symptoms (Percent of Class) at end of year

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</tr>
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<td>2011 Post-change</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 Post-change</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 Post-change</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 Post-change</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Post-change</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 Post-change</td>
<td>6%</td>
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# Impact of Curricular Changes in Years 1 and 2

## Moderate- Severe Anxiety Symptoms (Percent of Class) at end of year

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<td>30%</td>
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End-of-year 1 Depression Scores

Percent (%) of Students

Depression Symptom Scores

Pre-Change: Classes of 2011 and 2012
Most Recent: Class of 2018
External Bench-marking
Association of American Medical Colleges
Year 2 Questionnaire
## External Bench-marking
### AAMC Year 2 Questionnaire Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>SLU</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Climate</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-fac. Interaction</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived stress</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
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My medical school has done a good job of fostering and nurturing my development as a person.

Strongly agree to strongly disagree
Year 2 Questionnaire

My medical school has done a good job of fostering and nurturing my development as a person.

Strongly agree or agree
National- 70.7%
SLU- 92.3%
Impact of Curricular Changes in Years 1 and 2

But what happened to academic performance???
Impact of Curricular Changes in Years 1 and 2

Performance in Years 1 and 2

No decrease in mean exam scores or increase in failure rate in courses.

Mean national board scores have shown significant increase
Mindfulness, Metacognition, and Resilience
Mindfulness

Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.
Mindfulness

How to cultivate
   Formal practice
   Informal practice
Metacognition
Resilience
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring

Risks of maladaptive perfectionism
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring
Negativity bias
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring
Negativity bias
Optimistic versus pessimistic explanatory styles
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring
Negativity bias
Optimistic versus pessimistic explanatory styles
Positive emotions
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring
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Positive emotions
Emotional self-regulation
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring
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Positive emotions
Emotional self-regulation
Investing in well-being
Resilience

Cognitive restructuring
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Positive emotions
Emotional self-regulation
Investing in well-being
Finding meaning in life
Lessons Learned
Lessons Learned

Need for measurement of mental health
Lessons Learned

Need for measurement
Can’t resilience our way out of this
Lessons Learned

Need for measurement
Can’t resilience our way out of this
   Need to look at and change the environment
Lessons Learned

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Can’t resilience our way out of this
   Need to look at and change the environment
   Need to understand lived experience of students
Lessons Learned

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Can’t resilience our way out of this
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      Need to identify stressors and work to change
Lessons Learned

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Recognize risk of thinking of mental health issues as disease/illness
Lessons Learned

Need for measurement
Can’t resilience our way out of this
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Need to identify psychological traits/constructs that put some students at greater risk
Recognize risk of thinking of mental health issues as disease/illness
Help students develop skills of meta-cognition
“I have come gradually to understand that the liberal-arts cliche about "teaching you how to think" is actually shorthand for a much deeper, more serious idea: "Learning how to think" really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience.”
Lessons Learned

Need for measurement
Can't resilience our way out of this
   Need to look at and change the environment
   Need to understand lived experience of students
      Need to identify stressors and work to change
      Need to identify psychological traits/constructs that put some students at greater risk
Recognize risk of thinking of mental health issues as disease/illness
Help students develop skills of meta-cognition
Help students find meaning in their lives
Viktor Frankl
“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. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.”