Development and Implementation of a Comprehensive Peer Support Program for Medical Students at the University of Ottawa
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Potential for conflict(s) of interest:
Kelsey Mongrain & Dr Kay-Anne Haykal have not received payment or funding from any organization supporting this program. No products are being discussed in this program.
Objectives

1. Recognize the need for prevention, identification, and treatment of mental illness early in medical training;

2. Identify factors that contribute to poor help-seeking behaviors in medical students;

3. Describe the implementation of a peer support program in medical school including planning, recruitment, training, and evaluation.
Background

- Students enter medical school with relatively good mental health.
- Depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation are most prevalent during medical school and then decline with each career stage.
  - 27.2% screened positive for depression
  - 11.1% reported suicidal ideation
- The increased risk for suicide among physicians may begin during medical school.
- The training process may contribute to the deterioration of mental health in medical trainees.
Background

- Relative to the general population, medical students are less likely to receive appropriate treatment.
  - Only 15.7% of students who screened positive for depression sought treatment

- Students prefer to seek help from their family, friends and peers rather than approaching health professionals or faculty members for support.

- Physicians also prefer to receive support from their colleagues.
Survey

137 MD students year 1 to 3
29% response rate

participated in the

24-QUESTIONS SURVEY

sent via

Facebook

Email
Seeking Help

Which of the following best describes you when you’re experiencing mental health distress?

- I avoid seeking help
- I delay seeking help
- I rapidly seek help
Barriers

Which of the following is currently a barrier for you to seek help from the services provided by the faculty?

Choose all that apply.

- Not thinking one is stressed enough for help
- Fearing impact on career progression
- Being unable to identify personal distress
For each of the following categories, please choose the order of who you would go to for support?

Rank each support option from 1 to 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Physical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Peer Supporter</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer Supporter</td>
<td>Family Faculty Services (ex: SAO)</td>
<td>Peer Supporter</td>
<td>Peer Supporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Faculty Services (ex: SAO)</td>
<td>Faculty Services (ex: SAO)</td>
<td>Faculty Services (ex: SAO)</td>
<td>Faculty Services (ex: SAO)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Openness

How would you feel if a Peer Supporter checked-in with you to see how you are doing based on changes in your behaviour?

I would feel relieved
I would feel neutral
I would feel uncomfortable
Opportunity

MEDICAL SCHOOL → RESIDENCY → STAFF
Evidence

- Currently, the majority of peer-led programs in medical school focus on academic support.

- Peer-led programs can improve help-seeking behaviours in university and high school students.
  - In the extreme situation of suicide, young adults prefer talking with a peer rather than a parent, staff member or a counsellor.

- Peer Support Program in veterinary school:
  - 74% agreed that it creates a supportive atmosphere
Goals

1. Improve help-seeking behaviours;
2. Reduce stigma;
3. Approach peers who are at risk of experiencing distress based on behavioural changes;
4. Provide non-judgemental, accessible and confidential peer support from students who have undergone training;
5. Facilitate students’ pathway to proper resources and professional services.
Planning

- Working group of medical students from all years
- In direct collaboration with the Student Affairs Office
- Key resources:
  - U of O survey results
  - Key recommendations from Guidelines in High-Risk Organizations
  - Similar programs
Recruiting

Recruitment email

Application Forms

Panel Interviews

Candidate Selection
Training

September 2019

Weekend Training:
1. Peer Support 101
2. Communication & Basic Counselling
3. Responsibilities, Limits & Resources
4. Crises & Suicide
5. Common Scenarios & Practice
6. Self-Care

Additional sessions:
• Debrief
• Address concerns
• Topic of choice

September 2020

Refresher Training:
• For returning Peer Supporters
• Emphasize important concepts
Training

WORKSHOP 3: LIMITS, RESOURCES & RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Presentation
What are your responsibilities? What are the limits to your role?

3.2 Activity
What behavioural changes might you recognize in peers who may be struggling?

3.3 Resources
What resources are available to students?

3.4 Integrative Activity
Where should I refer this student?
Tasks

- Available 3 hours weekly
  - On Google Calendar
  - Only during specific blocks for 3rd year students

- Informal and proactive
  - Peer Supporters check in on students

- Knowledge of resources
Wellness

- Schedule restrictions
  - Maximum of 3 hours weekly
  - Cannot exceed 10pm

- Mandatory monthly forms
  - Screened by counsellors

- Access to Student Affairs Office

- Group debriefing sessions
  - Facilitated by counsellors
Confidentiality

- Confidentiality Agreement
  - For all medical students
  - Signed at beginning of year

- Peer Supporter Contract
  - Exceptions to confidentiality

- Anonymous Database
  - Log each interaction
Conclusion

- *Side by Side* adopts an integrative, proactive and preventative approach to mental health.

- Careful evaluation of the *Side by Side* pilot program will ensure that students’ needs are met.


