

Canadian Federation of Medical Students' response to "The alarming situation of medical student mental health"

Réaction de la Fédération des étudiants et des étudiantes en médecine du Canada à l'article « La situation alarmante de la santé mentale des étudiants en médecine »

Lucas King,¹ Jack Hao Yuan,² Henry Li,³ Victor Do^{4,5}

¹College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Canada; ²Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia, British Columbia, Canada; ³Max Rady College of Medicine, University of Manitoba, Manitoba, Canada; ⁴University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada; ⁵University of Alberta, Alberta, Canada

Correspondence to: Lucas King, 454 Gladmer Park, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4P 2X3; email: lbk515@usask.ca

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Whether we call it a crisis or not, there is no denying we are far from ensuring Canadian medical students are thriving in health-promoting learning environments.¹ Despite growing efforts in this area in recent years, we have not made substantial progress.¹ The evidence is clear; medical students' mental health and wellbeing worsen during medical school, and this effect persists throughout training.² Consistent with this growing body of literature, we routinely hear from students about their mental health challenges since entering medical school. Maintaining significant non-curricular and curricular workloads in unhealthy learning environments is challenging, to say the least. The hurdles we face in addressing medical student wellbeing are substantial but not insurmountable. We must act to ensure the health of our students and that of their future patients.

The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) supports and applauds both our members and many Canadian medical schools for their work targeting individual students' wellbeing through resiliency, mindfulness, social events, and other initiatives such as our annual National Wellness Challenge. Similarly, we are proud of the CFMS Wellness Curriculum Task Force (WCTF) for developing a Wellness Curriculum Framework,³ which we hope will guide the implementation of medical school

initiatives targeting individual students. Although these initiatives are essential, they are not sufficient on their own. For years, our membership has endorsed the belief that we must address the system-level root causes that make medical students unwell to see meaningful changes in outcomes. To challenge the status quo, we must look beyond free food and meditation to the education system and culture we have developed within the medical community.

In recent years, the CFMS membership, including the Health Promoting Learning Environments Task Force and WCTF, has produced several evidence-based position papers and reports addressing topics believed to impact student wellbeing negatively. The CFMS is currently working on compiling a comprehensive set of recommendations based upon these papers related to workload restrictions, mistreatment, wellness curricula, creating health-promoting learning environments, and more. Additionally, we believe medical schools should prioritize student wellbeing by integrating health promotion principles into program evaluation criteria and decision-making frameworks at all levels. We hope medical schools will use these recommendations in conjunction with those of the AFMC Faculty and Learner Wellness

Working Group upon their anticipated release later in 2021.

Many of the concerns raised within these documents are well within the power of leaders in medical education to address. We call upon the medical education community to join the CFMS in its commitment to improving medical student wellbeing and critically appraising current systems that contribute to high levels of burnout and distress amongst medical students. We call upon Canadian medical schools to establish connections with local student wellness and CFMS representatives to consider the above recommendations, including those of the AFMC Faculty and Learner Wellness Working Group, assess current practices, co-create a measurable action plan, and implement change. Canadian medical students are dedicated, passionate, and committed to improving the culture of medicine to foster a healthier medical community, but we cannot achieve this alone.

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