

Thriving Together: a novel workshop to improve cohesion and class culture in medical school cohorts

S'épanouir ensemble : un nouvel atelier pour améliorer la cohésion et la culture de classe dans les cohortes de l'école de médecine

Tyler Herod,¹ Brett Henderson,¹ Matthew Donovan,¹ Qëndresa Sahiti,¹ R Zachary Ford,¹ Emma McDermott¹

¹Faculty of Medicine, Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia, Canada

Correspondence to: Tyler Herod; email: tylerherod@dal.ca

Published ahead of issue: Apr 2, 2024; published: Aug 30, 2024. CMEJ 2024, 15(4) Available at <https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.77966>

© 2024 Herod, Henderson, Donovan, Sahiti, Ford, McDermott; licensee Synergies Partners. This is an Open Journal Systems article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Implication Statement

Thriving Together, a workshop for first year medical students, addresses crucial aspects of class culture early into medical school. Through small group discussions, this student-led event creates a safe space for open dialogue and self-reflection. Participants gain valuable insights into classmates' perspectives and how to foster communication, empathy, and improved class cultures. These lessons are likely to transfer into future practice through enhanced conflict-resolution and relationship-building skills, contributing to higher-quality patient care. Because Thriving Together can readily be adopted elsewhere, we encourage other medical schools to conduct similar workshops to help in addressing an otherwise neglected aspect of medical education.

Énoncé des implications de la recherche

S'épanouir ensemble, un atelier destiné aux étudiants en première année de médecine, aborde les aspects cruciaux de la culture de classe dès le début des études de médecine. Grâce à des discussions en petits groupes, cet événement organisé par les étudiants crée un espace sûr pour un dialogue ouvert et une auto-réflexion. Les participants acquièrent des connaissances précieuses sur les perspectives de leurs camarades de classe et sur la manière de favoriser la communication, l'empathie et l'amélioration de la culture de classe. Ces leçons sont susceptibles d'être transférées dans la pratique future grâce à l'amélioration des compétences en matière de résolution des conflits et d'établissement de relations, contribuant ainsi à des soins de meilleure qualité pour les patients. Comme S'épanouir ensemble peut facilement être adopté ailleurs, nous encourageons d'autres facultés de médecine à organiser des ateliers similaires pour aider à aborder un aspect autrement négligé de l'enseignement médical.

Introduction

Collaboration and collegiality in medical school benefit students' confidence, evaluations, and clinical skills.^{1,2} Collaborative learning improves self-efficacy and decreased rates of burnout.^{1,3} Similarly, a collaborative environment can improve team efficiency and resource allocation⁴ as well as patient outcomes, including wait times and access to care.⁵

The medical school admission process is designed to select for discipline, ambition, and organization—characteristics which can be misaligned with a collaborative

temperament. The learning environment within medical schools can also discourage collaboration by fostering competition between classmates in test scores, research opportunities, and clinical experiences.^{1,3}

To promote early collegiality, medical schools hold orientation events as a means for students to meet one-another. Yet, no subsequent events exist in the formal curriculum that bring the class together to discuss topics such as class culture. To address this gap, we formed Thriving Together, a student-led workshop that addresses class dynamics and community building while navigating the challenges of medical training.

Innovation

Thriving Together is designed for first-year medical students. The workshop takes place in October, shortly after completing their first set of exams. The workshop is held outside of the formal curriculum, with voluntary participation. To provide incentive to attend, students receive a complimentary dinner during the event. The workshop is advertised during lectures, on social media, and through email. Students register online.

The workshop begins with an initial presentation focusing on class culture. Students then break into smaller groups to discuss the initial presentation and reflect upon case-based vignettes, which cover topics such as academic struggles, comparing yourself to classmates, and how to make friends. Organizers developed the vignettes based on experiences within their own class cohorts. Upper-year medical students are assigned to each group to facilitate conversations and encourage reflection⁶. The event concludes with a final synthesis that allows attendees the opportunity to speak to the larger group about their experiences.

Evaluation

Thriving Together has taken place over three consecutive years. Attendance has been high, with an average of approximately 50% of students from each first-year class attending. Following the workshop, to gather feedback, we sent students a survey consisting of Likert-style and short-answer questions. The results obtained suggest that Thriving Together is successful in reaching its goals. Representative quotes are highlighted in Table 1. Furthermore, 96.6% of attendees said they would recommend the workshop to future cohorts.

Table 1. Survey quotes from students that attended Thriving Together workshops

Workshop	Quotes
#1 and #2	<p><i>"I think the benefits are identifying that not everyone is having a positive experience, and being able to have the class collectively acknowledge that and strive to do better is an important outcome."</i></p> <p><i>"I find I feel more involved in my class when I attend these"</i></p> <p><i>"I find these sessions are an amazing opportunity to bond with classmates"</i></p> <p><i>"We had really unique conversations that aren't brought up elsewhere, and it puts unique people in groups together"</i></p>
#3	<p><i>"A lot of my class is in the same boat, and I wouldn't have known without this facilitated discussion"</i></p> <p><i>"It was nice to know that other people were feeling the same way and it was nice to hear from the med 2s that they had a lot of the same concerns re making friends or finding your people as us"</i></p>

Next steps

Thriving Together is successfully empowering the next generation of physicians to develop stronger bonds with their classmates, their future colleagues. Limitations of the workshop do exist, including its evening scheduling, which poses a challenge for students) to attend (particularly those who are parents. Moreover, a lack of understanding exists regarding the impacts the workshop had on each cohort. Next steps include a quality improvement study that will survey past attendees and evaluate the influence Thriving Together had on outcomes like class culture and collegiality.

Conflicts of Interest: None.

Funding: Thriving Together has been funded by the Dalhousie Medical Students' Society Presidents Fund and now annually funded through the Class of '83 Wellness Fund.

Acknowledgements: Past and current Thriving Together members: Nick Cochkanoff (Class of 2021), Christopher Hung (Class of 2022), Billy Toulany (Class of 2023), Joel Richard (Class of 2024), Jennifer Akerman (Class of 2025), Ali Doucet (Class of 2026) Support from: Dr. Joanne MacDonald, Sharon Forward, Dr. Lisa Sutherland, Dr. Sonya Swift, and all our student facilitators and participants

Edited by: Anita Acai (senior section editor); Marcel D'Eon (editor-in-chief)

References

1. Tolsgaard MG, Bjørck S, Rasmussen MB, Ringsted C. Improving efficiency of clinical skills training: a randomized trial. *J Gen Intern Med*. 2013;28(8):1072-1077. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-013-2378-4>
2. Earnest MA, Williams J, Aagaard EM. Toward an optimal pedagogy for teamwork. *Acad Med*. 2017;92(10):1378-1381. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000001670>
3. Tolsgaard MG, Kulasegaram KM, Ringsted CV. Collaborative learning of clinical skills in health professions education: the why, how, when and for whom. *Med Educ*. 2016;50(1):69-78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.12814>
4. Zwarenstein M, Reeves S, Perrier L. Effectiveness of pre-licensure interprofessional education and post-licensure collaborative interventions. *J Interprof Care*. 2005;19(1):148-165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820500082800>
5. Haynes AB, Weiser TG, Berry WR, et al. A surgical safety checklist to reduce morbidity and mortality in a global population. *N Engl J Med*. 2009;360(5):491-9. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMs0810119>
6. Cruess RL, Cruess SR, Steinert Y. Medicine as a community of practice: implications for medical education. *Acad Med* 2018;93(2):185-191. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000001826>