

Well-being Status of Incoming Physician Assistant (PA) Students



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Background

- Physician burnout, which has an estimated prevalence of >50%, has been independently linked to professional misconduct, increased medical errors and suicide.¹
- Severe burnout has also been reported among multiple PA specialties, with an estimated >40% of PAs having at least one symptom of burnout.²
- Evidence supports that these same trends in increased depression, burnout and suicidal ideation carry over into medical student training, but limited data currently exists on the well-being of PA students.³
- With over 75% of PA students expressing interest in participating in a wellness intervention, we aim to provide PA programs with an evidence-based, reproducible curriculum that teaches foundational skills that have been linked to improvements in well-being.⁴
- This presents the descriptive statistics for the pre-survey.

Methods

- First year PA students from 4 institutions were included in this study (N=185)
- All students were enrolled in a 16-week required Clinician Well-being sub-course that counts towards participation points.
 - Course started 4 weeks into PA program
 - Core topics: mindfulness and decentering, vulnerability, reflective writing
 - Content structure: Mix of recorded discussions, mini-lectures, readings and reflective writing forums
- Student participation: Pre-survey (reported here), weekly course content, optional live focus groups, and post-survey (results pending)
- Surveys:
 - Demographics
 - Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PHLMS)
 - Open Minds Stigma Scale for Health Care Providers (OMS-HC)
 - Self-Stigma of Seeking Help (SSOSH)
 - UCLA Loneliness Scale (R-UCLA)
 - Reflective Practice Questionnaire subscales reflective on action, stress interacting with patients, self-appraisal, reflective in action, job satisfaction
 - Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test Concise (AUDIT-C)

Results

182 students consented to participation in the pre-survey (98.4%)

Demographics:

- Age: 27.9(6.3)
- Gender: 67.6% female
- Race: 80.8% White
- Ethnicity: 87.4% Non-Hispanic

Question	"Yes"
Do you feel that you have a strong support system?	97.6%
Do you know what mental health resources are available to you?	58.6%
Do you think you would reach out to mental health help if you thought you needed it?	55.2%
Do you think your faculty support your:	
• Academic needs	95.0%
• Mental health needs	93.4%
Have you considered not starting PA school in the past 3 months?	17.1%

Survey measures scores M(SD)

- PHLMS: 65.74(14.7)
Scored 20-100, higher scores = increased mindfulness
- OMS-HC: 57.0(11.6)
Scored 15-75, higher scores = less stigma
- SSOSH: 35.6(9.3)
Scored 10-50, higher scores = less stigma
- R-UCLA: 5.2(1.81)
Scored 3-9, higher scores = increased loneliness
- RPQ:
Each scored 4-24, higher scores = increased insight
- Reflective on action: 15.8(5.7)
 - Stress interacting with patients: 11.7(5.0)
 - Self-appraisal: 16.4(5.6)
 - Reflective in action: 14.7(5.5)
 - Job satisfaction: 17.5(6.1)
- AUDIT-C: 5.6(1.9)
Scored 3-9, higher scores = increased loneliness

Conclusions

- Four weeks into PA school, nearly all students in the study feel they have a strong support system and that their faculty support both their academic and mental health needs.
- Nearly half of students still believe that they would not reach out for mental health help if they thought they needed it.
- About half of students were still unsure of what mental health resources are available to them. While all programs are required to provide support services to their students, it appears that students should be frequently reminded of what is available.
- With over 60% of students reporting that they feel isolated from others at least some of the time, we need to continue working towards wellness solutions that build a sense of community among students.
- With 17.1% of students reporting they seriously considered not starting/leaving their PA program, additional research should be done to determine what factors are influencing these thoughts and what can be done to further support students following admission.

References

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