

Mental Well-Being in Medical Formal Training: What COVID-19 Pandemic Also Revealed

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected higher education. Since social distancing and confinement were used as sanitary measurements, universities shut their doors and countries limited academic exchange by closing borders. Psychological well-being or eudaimonic perspective focuses on meaning and self-fulfillment. The practical implications of these data, pushed some universities around the world to implement well-being activities and curriculum modifications meant to promote self-care, lower stress, and generate social support for medical apprentices, with resources, infrastructure, and evaluation; but also, to move from concern to reaction and therefore, to prevention. The disease provoked by the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 since December 2019 placed students' mental well-being in the foreground. From a systematic review of 1316 articles published between 2019 y 2021, 126 of them in their complete version were picked as they met the inclusion criteria to accomplish the meta-analysis of 41, which involved 36'608 medical students in 22 countries.

Keywords

Pandemic, Mental health, COVID-19, Positive psychology, Medical students.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on the educational field around the world. Numerous students, from basic

to higher education, were affected as they had to modify their learning process and their ways of study. As for the professors, it exposed greatly their scarce skills in teaching, evaluation, and control of their virtual practice. At the educational institutions, it was outlined the lack of planning and the appalling curriculum adequacy against backdrops of this magnitude.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected higher education. Since social distancing and confinement were used as sanitary measurements, universities shut their doors and countries limited academic exchange by closing borders [1].

According to UNESCO, nearly 24 million students, from the preschool level to the college level, were at risk of not going back to school in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among them, undergraduates bore the brunt of the problem due to the costs associated with their education, followed by preschoolers and elementary school students [2].

A year prior to the pandemic, educative politics around the world were focused on two aspects: the politic-economic one, which was oriented to a quality education based on governmental educational systems that respond to the demand of millions of students. As a result, the World Bank suggested governments around the world invest in the development of global public assets, which could be used to diagnose the educational system performance and to support the improvement actions [3]. The social subject focuses on the societies of knowledge under the premise that richness and human well-being increase because of knowledge. Regarding this second aspect, the Cooperation and Economic Development Organization provides its economy members, and associates assistance for the planning and management of their educational systems, but also implementation of reforms that allow students, parents, teachers, and the ones responsible for the formulation of educational politics to overcome obstacles. The objective is to achieve wellness and growth so the improvement of education knows no boundaries [4].

The purpose of this article is to provide a theoretical and reflexive base regarding social, emotional, and cognitive development in medical training.

Health and Mental well-being

After two years of the World Health Organization (WHO) foundation, a mental hygiene expert committee proposed the concept of mental health [5], an idea that despite slight variations is still current.

WHO defines mental health as "...state of well-being in which the individual is aware of his or her own abilities; can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and effectively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" [6].

The definition of mental health underlies a positive sense of health, thus, positive psychology. Positive psychology has as its purpose the study of vital satisfaction, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, and other positive psychological variables, as well as the resource usage for its advertisement [7].

Positive psychology [8] focuses on the study of pleasant emotions, growth, competence to face and overcome, the search for happiness, virtues, human potentialities, strengths, and character positive features [9]. Behind this conceptualization, it is promoted the idea of mental health oriented to promotion and personal

development. There are three mental well-being psychological processes: negative-positive affections, commitment feelings and long-lasting satisfaction [10].

In summary, the general conceptual framework in terms of positive psychology [11] focuses on personal development, subjective satisfaction feelings and the achievement of happiness. Its study generated two constructs: psychological well-being and subjective well-being. Psychological well-being or eudaimonic perspective focuses on meaning and self-fulfillment. Also, it defines well-being in terms of the level at which a person fully functions. Meanwhile, subjective well-being or hedonic perspective concentrates on the subjective experience of happiness (pleasure achievement and avoidance of pain). These two constructs have given rise to different research lines and knowledge, which in some areas are divergent, and, in some others, complementary [12]. From the last argumentation and the definition provided by WHO in which health necessarily covers psychological well-being, its physical and social aspect; and the definition of health as the state of well-being in which the individual is conscious of his or her own abilities, and can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community, we can understand that this theoretical framework leads to mental well-being in its perspective of psychological well-being.

Before COVID-19, several studies demonstrated how medical students suffer from worst mental health than the rest of the population [13]. From a systematic review and meta-analysis of 195 studies involving 129'123 medical students in 47 countries, 27% showed positive depression symptoms and 11% showed suicidal thoughts [14].

The practical implications of these data, pushed some universities around the world to implement well-being activities and curriculum modifications meant to promote self-care, lower stress, and generate social support for medical apprentices, with resources, infrastructure, and evaluation; but also, to move from concern to reaction and therefore, to prevention [15-18]. Due to this mental health crisis among medical students, universities have tried preventive interventions in the syllabus [19-27].

Since the World Health Organization constitution, the school has been a social space where health must be promoted to improve it and to prevent diseases within the community. On these grounds, in its "Health Promoting Universities" inform, it is established that the "...universities can do several things to promote and safeguard their students and personnel health, create health favourable spaces to work, learn and live, protect the environment and encourage sustainability, to further health in teaching, research and among the community, and for it to be a resource for the health in the community..." [28].

To reach this purpose in 2019, Student Minds, the United Kingdom's student mental health charity, developed and proposed "The University Mental Health Charter" as a reference framework

to create a structure in which the efforts of the university sector can unite to benefit the whole university community. This framework is focused on four academic domains: 1) A curriculum that encourages students to develop their mental abilities, 2) Internal and external mental support services which are efficient at identifying early signs of significant disease, at adequately assessing the risk, providing interventions to all the affected people on the risk of suicide. These services should also warrant the safety of the environment, 3) the well-being and development of the ones working at universities. The achievement of the university mission is supported by a culture and a community based on mental and physical well-being, 4) Student life, including the physical and social environment on campus and residential living, it is necessary that universities guarantee places to live that are safe, appropriate, and physical and psychologically satisfying so that well-being and academic goals are achieved [29].

The disease provoked by the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 since December 2019 placed students' mental well-being in the foreground. From a systematic review of 1316 articles published between 2019 y 2021, 126 of them in their complete version were picked as they met the inclusion criteria to accomplish the meta-analysis of 41, which involved 36'608 medical students in 22 countries. The prevalence of depression and anxiety combined was 38% (CI of 95%: 31– 45%). In addition, the prevalence of anxiety combined with depression was 34 % (CI of 95 %: 27 –41 %); with variations according to sex, country, and continent. The conclusion was that depression and anxiety were higher than the general population and health workers [30].

Considering this evident vulnerability in which the medical student lives, it's urgently needed to reconsider the medical training so that healthy environments are promoted to achieve the mental and physical well-being of health professionals who will solve society's health problems in the short-term future with their knowledge, abilities, aptitudes, and attitudes; all this, according to Ottawa's Letter for Health Promotion.

It is greatly shown that the approach in which the medical student is trained is actually not able to reach the full development of their capabilities so they can adequately and positively confront the situations that put at risk their own health, their emotional and mental state in particular.

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