Wellness 2-for-1: Simultaneously promoting faculty and student personal wellness through an innovative curriculum

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Disclosures

• Matt Ewald – MUSC employee

• Diann Krywko – MUSC employee
Objectives

• 1.) Recall methods of how to develop an interactive student wellness curriculum

• 2.) Recognize that implementation of a student-oriented wellness curriculum can have personal health or wellness benefits to involved faculty or instructors
Part 1: Your assignment

• Take out a pen or pencil.

• Write July 12th, 2021 on the front and sign it.

• Now flip the card over so you see the blank side.

• We will use this again later, so keep it handy.
“Do as I say, not as I do”

• Are we unintentionally leading by bad example as educators?
  • Can occur in any setting
    • *Professional, medical, etc.*
  • May be particularly relevant for those acting as educators in their actual practice setting where students may be present and constantly observing your behaviors

• Are we even worse when it comes to wellness?
  • Do you tell your students (or patients) to be active, exercise, eat well, or quit their bad habits but don’t follow those recommendations yourself?
Why?

**Intentions of a faculty-led wellness curriculum**

- Improve the wellbeing of our (stressed) **students**
  - Students experience disruptive levels of stress during graduate training \(^1\)
  - Attrition, depression, burnout, and suicidal thoughts are a significant issue for medical students \(^2, 3, 4\)
- Providing **tools** for students to use later in their career
- Compliance with an **accreditation** organization
- Following national **trends in academia** to provide quality student wellness resources
- Shift toward **learner-centered** model of higher education

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1. Reference
2. Reference
3. Reference
4. Reference
Other possible reasons:

• Your boss / institution said so...

• Your instructional program needs to offer more online or “hybrid” courses

• Student feedback or request
How?

The curriculum & course

• Web-based elective course, with some in-person meetings

• Pass/fail grading

• Small cohort (< 20 students)

• A focus on work-life balance was made through introspection and relaxation techniques
The curriculum & course (cont’d)

• Course work included select reading assignments, self-reflections, journaling, and meditation

• Assignments were submitted or completed online

• The course emphasized:
  • Personal health maintenance
  • Good sleep hygiene and exercise
  • Decreased dependence on electronics
Course Objectives

• Demonstrate understanding of work-life balance issues and stressors facing physician assistant (PA) students and practicing PAs
• Recognize common reasons for career burnout in the medical field, as well as common signs/symptoms
• Identify and reflect on personal stressors
• Practice and implement at least one stress reduction method (such as meditation)
• Help to promote career longevity
Course assignments

• Should be related to the principles of your course objectives – *i.e.* promote wellness, educate students about burnout, etc.

• Should have **at least one** of the following constructs:
  • 1.) Involves self-reflection or analysis of personal stressors
  • 2.) Involves a physical action that students should take (*i.e.* meditation, yoga, exercise, etc.)
  • 3.) Involves interaction with others, so students can share and hear each other’s stories and/or hardships
Tips & tricks for course development

• An acronym for your course may be helpful
  • P.A.T.I.E.N.C.E. Curriculum - (Physician Assistant (student) Training (for) Introspection, rElaxation, aNd Career Endurance)

• Offer unique or non-traditional “assignments”
  • Examples:
    • Show and tell or plan/share a dream vacation
    • Treat yourself to a favorite treat before an exam (or after)
    • Reconnect with an old friend / schedule a health maintenance appt.
    • Have an electronics-free weekend

• Consider student schedules, be flexible, and make it fun

• Time the course based on when students need it most
So what about us?

- **Wellness is needed by faculty just as much as students**
  - Many academic centers are increasing focus on employee/faculty wellness
  - Should employees/faculty have mandatory wellness training?
  - Add to an annual competency training?

- **Interesting trend that some hospitals are now implementing a Chief Wellness Officer (CWO) in the C-suite**
  - Stanford University offers a CWO course
  - We all want happy employees that will stay for years to come
Unintentional benefits

• Instructor participation in course assignments can provide a personal feel and can enhance course buy-in from students.

• Allows instructor to reap the benefits of the course.

• Allows you to “practice what you preach”.

• Can help to demystify faculty.

• Allows instructor to know students more comprehensively.
Unintentional benefits (cont’d)

• In a learner-centered environment, comprehensive understanding of our students may be a key to ensuring student success and providing appropriate remediation, when needed.

• Similarly, employers may be able to prevent faculty/instructor attrition and recognize those at-risk for burnout by implementing a course where instructors also participate.
How we arrived here

• Over all else, this is a great way to invest in improving the quality of our students’ experiences during their training

• At my program, I determined that the students deserved a wellness outlet to help promote a good school-life balance

• I even channeled my struggles as a grad student to help create portions of the curriculum

• And I wanted to take part in the course and lead by example
  • I even like to share my travel stories with my students (and Dr. K)
Lessons Learned & Suggestions

• Involve more faculty by offering course at various times throughout the year with different instructors
  • Required vs. elective?

• Allow for open discussions

• Consider your audience – No PowerPoints? Etc.

• Don’t overload students with reading assignments
  • Make them relevant and thought provoking – ask them to reflect
Part 2: Your assignment

• Using the blank side of your index card, write down two (2) life goals that you’d like to accomplish within the next five years.

• And now your homework...
• Take your index card home
• Put it in a visible place
  • Using the date listed on the front, you have your deadline
  • Hold yourself accountable 😊
DON’T FORGET TO TAKE A MOMENT TO SHARE IN YOUR COURSE!
Thank you

QUESTIONS?
References


• Slide 20 Photo Credit: Shutterstock.com/ Ivelin Radkov