

## **Effectiveness of Teaching Mental Health Sessions on Medical Student Comfort with Teaching Wellness and Considerations for Global Pandemics**

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**BACKGROUND:** Protective factors for mental health are important to understand in the context of global pandemics, as the increased stressed and heightened social isolation from physical distancing has a negative impact on mental health. Rising Youth is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that aims to teach and de-stigmatize mental health to adolescents. Volunteer educators are passionate medical students who believe that mental wellness skills should be taught, grown, and emphasized during the crucial adolescent years. Medical students guest speak at two local high schools, Oviedo and Econ River high school and teach a group of 10-20 high schoolers mental wellness topics. Mental wellness topics include introduction to mental wellness, healthy coping skills, mindfulness and meditation, stress, anxiety, and depression.

**METHODS:** The objective of this study was to determine the impact of teaching mental health sessions on the comfort level of medical students with teaching mental wellness topics. This is a survey study that involved 18 medical student volunteers ranging from M1 to M4 who facilitated one to two one-hour session(s) on diverse mental health topics during the Spring and Fall of 2019 at Econ River High School or Oviedo High School in Orlando, Florida. After a semester of teaching, medical students were sent a survey with various questions regarding how their teaching experience impacted their comfort level dealing with adolescents and topics of mental health.

**RESULTS:** Most of the medical students who participated as a teacher in the Rising Youth mental health awareness high school outreach program found it a positive experience (n=17). The majority of medical students also reported they felt more comfortable educating adolescent patients about mental wellness (n=16) and that they learned about the outside resources for different mental health topics in the local area (n=16). However, given the small number of students studied (n=18), our results cannot be generalized to other groups of volunteer mental health educators.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Our preliminary data showed that most medical students found volunteering with Rising Youth to be a positive experience, and they became more comfortable discussing and handling difficult mental health topics. This confidence of medical students in discussing tough mental health topics with likely apply to wellness discussions patients in the future. Future studies should provide the comfort questionnaire both before and after student participation in Rising Youth. Given the increased incidence of mental health problems during Global Pandemics, Rising Youth and similar educational programs should incorporate virtual education platforms and educational information to connect youth with mental health resources via telehealth.