INCREASING SELF-AWARENESS OF MEDICAL STUDENT DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE USING A WEB-BASED MODULE

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Purpose: Depression is an under-recognized yet common and treatable disorder among physicians and medical students. Suicide is a disproportionately high cause of physician mortality. In 2003, a consensus statement from an expert group organized by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention called for medical schools to increase depression and suicidality education. We developed an educational module to increase medical students’ level of self-awareness and knowledge regarding the epidemiology of, risk factors for, and signs and symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation.

Methods: We created a web-based learning module using scenarios familiar to pre-clinical medical students. Cases, short quizzes, and text passages were blended to provide a fast-paced, interactive and engaging experience. The evidence-based content includes links to relevant research articles, depression screening tools and internet resources. A module prototype will be completed by a group of second-year medical students, and we will collect data on students’ responses to the module questions and an opinion-based survey on the module’s content. Afterwards, we will employ student feedback to refine the module for completion by all first-year medical students as part of our School’s fall Ethics, Law and Professionalism course and curriculum on physician impairment. We will assess the impact of our module using pre- and post-tests and in a follow-up survey. Module content will also be reinforced during later courses, including the first-year Introduction to Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences Clerkship.

Discussion: This module will increase medical students’ self-awareness and knowledge in the areas of depression epidemiology, risk factors, signs and symptoms, and in the relationship between depression and suicide. It may also have the potential to help students obtain assistance earlier in the course of their own depressive illnesses and possibly to augment their skill and comfort in identifying and referring depressed colleagues for appropriate treatment. Addressing this important topic early in medical student curricula could, potentially, also lead to improved recognition and treatment of depression by students among their patients at a formative period in their training.