

Managing healthcare student wellbeing beyond the coronavirus pandemic

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Title = Managing healthcare student wellbeing beyond the coronavirus pandemic

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Theme = Student experience, engagement and achievement

Promotional abstract (100 words)

Student mental wellbeing has been negatively affected by the coronavirus pandemic. For healthcare students there have been the additional challenges of disrupted university and clinical education experiences as well as directly witnessing the impact of the virus on patients and their families. Government concerns about the future nursing, midwifery and allied health profession (NMAHP) workforce and their retention led to a survey of Scottish healthcare students to establish their need, knowledge and utilisation of wellbeing resources, as well as to ascertain what additional support might be required (and where best to locate this).

Background, including underpinning literature and, wherever possible, the international relevance of the research (maximum 100 words)

Student mental health was already a matter of concern prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (Hubble & Bolton, 2020), with the burnout and distress being cited globally by healthcare students a further cause for concern (Rios-Risquez et al, 2016). During the pandemic frontline workers, most especially nurses, were at highest risk of negative mental health outcomes (De Kock et al, 2021) consequently, preserving good mental wellbeing became a priority area to support a sustainable healthcare workforce (WHO, 2020). This study sought to explore the perceived value and gaps in current wellbeing resources for healthcare students in order to inform ongoing developments.

Aim(s) and/or research question(s)/research hypothesis(es) (maximum 100 words)

The aims of the survey were to:-

1. Understand how requests from healthcare students for health and wellbeing support had changed from pre-pandemic to the present moment.
2. Discover what internal and external wellbeing resources healthcare students were using (and when), as well as their perceived value.
3. Uncover if there were perceived gaps in relation to health and wellbeing support, and what could be done at university and/or national level to address this, particularly as services endeavoured to resume pre-Covid-19 operations.

Research methodology/research design, any ethical issues, and methods of data collection and analysis (maximum 100 words)

Ethics permission was granted to conduct a Qualtrics online anonymised survey in the first 2 weeks of June 2021 to gather qualitative data to understand pandemic-related issues pertaining to healthcare student wellbeing. Healthcare faculty staff within Scottish universities and student leaders were asked by the Council of Deans of Health Wellbeing Short-life Working Group to alert students via email/social media to the survey. The communication contained an embedded link and noted that participation was voluntary. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage approach to thematic analysis was adopted to examine the trends emerging in the data.

Key findings and recommendations (maximum 200 words)

While a number of students were very positive about the available support, the pandemic had evidently caused high levels of distress with many emotionally-loaded negative responses.

It was felt that universities could do more to help work-life balance (including better placement planning, management of deadlines, careful organisation of content), to help them connect with peers, to ensure that staff were regularly checking in on students, to recognise diversity/individual circumstances and to be attuned to pleas for help. It was felt that more bespoke mental health/counselling support was needed, as well as opportunities to debrief. Health events promoting self-care were also requested. At a national level, students requested:-

- Continued discussion with professional bodies about requisite hours for registration
- Standard processes for placement management
- Adherence to supernumerary status
- Student hubs in placement areas
- Review of student financial support
- Access to specialist pastoral support officers/post- placement therapy
- Regulated processes for clinical assessors/supervisors
- Upskilling in mental health support for healthcare academics
- Recognition of their contribution to healthcare
- Online fora for healthcare students to connect
- A one-stop shop for web-based wellbeing resources

Study outcomes were shared with the Council of Deans of Health membership and with Scottish Government healthcare representatives to inform pandemic transition action plans.

Three key points to indicate how your work contributes to knowledge development within the selected theme (maximum 100 words)

- A sustainable healthcare workforce is fundamental to the delivery of care. Prior to the advent of Covid- 19 there were concerns around resilience and retention, these have been further exacerbated by the toll of the pandemic.
- Good academic practices, processes, and support systems and the promotion of good self-care can enable a healthy work-life balance for healthcare students and will be important to recruiting and retaining this workforce.
- More could be done within government health departments to acknowledge the contribution of healthcare students and to ensure that there are available and appropriate resources to support their clinical learning.

References

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Keywords

Healthcare students, mental wellbeing, resilience, student support