

Breaking down barriers to students accessing wellbeing support

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Session outline

- Our experience of utilising a collaborative approach to improving student wellbeing
- Strategies utilised to break down perceived barriers to accessing and engaging with support
- Merits of a balanced population/ tailored approach



Local context

- MPharm: 4 year undergraduate vocational degree
- Pre-registration year in practice after graduation
- All programmes are accredited by the General Pharmaceutical Council
- Assessments: Traditional exams, coursework assignments, Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs), presentations, professional skills portfolios
- Currently 100-150 students/year at DMU

Barriers to students accessing wellbeing support

- **Known barriers in university students**
 - Perceived stigma
 - **Self-stigma**
 - Potential impact on studies
 - Anxiety and lack of confidence in disclosure
 - Current mental health symptoms

Cage et al, 2018

Local experience of perceived barriers

I don't have time. I'll get behind on my work.

Student welfare is the other side of campus, and there's always a queue

The counsellors don't understand what it's like to be a pharmacy student. They don't know about OSCEs and stuff

I'm not bad enough. Everyone's stressed

If I discuss any mental health worries I'll have to face Fitness to Practice

I'd be admitting I was a failure if I asked for help

There's a real stigma in my culture about mental health. I don't want my mum finding out

Challenges:

- How to encourage more students to access support?
- How to promote proactive strategies to manage wellbeing?
- How to facilitate students to recognise managing their wellbeing as an essential professional skill?

Tailored support for MPharm students

Embedded within modules	Introductory lecture in Year 1	PDP points and/or other form of recognition for students attending optional sessions
Explicit links between Programme and Personal Tutorial support	Co-delivered bespoke coaching workshops	Staff and student evaluation of the programme
Online tools and resources made available on Blackboard	Promotion of other sources of help and support	Collaboration with student coaching and counselling team and disability support

Evans and Ward, 2018

Barrier: Perceived lack of time and inconvenient location

- Self- help resources accessible online
- Student welfare assessment appointments made available within the School building
 - Specifically for MPharm students
 - When no teaching timetabled
- Drop-in Wellbeing week activities in break-out area
- Integration of support linked to assessments within timetable
 - Group work
 - Presentation skills
 - Maths anxiety and dyscalculia screening

Barrier: “I’m not bad enough”

- Population-based approach utilised
- Emphasised relevance to **all** students and future healthcare professionals to maximise wellbeing
- Links to maximising achievements and performance
 - Typically high-achieving, perfectionist, results-driven students
- Coaching methodology
- Progress and goal setting

Keep calm and succeed in your MPharm OSCEs workshop

Reflection on past performance

How did I feel when I did my last OSCE (or other practical type exam)?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Wish I wasn't here. OSCEs are the worst thing ever									I feel fine- just another assessment to get out of the way	

Three words to describe how I felt at the time

1.

2.

3.

- How did I know I felt like this?: Physical symptoms, emotions, behaviours
- Another time when I felt like this
- How did I feel **after** my last OSCEs (or other practical type exam)?

Planning for the future

How do you want to feel walking into your next OSCEs?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Wish I wasn't here. OSCEs are the worst thing ever									I feel fine- just another assessment to get out of the way	

Barrier: Lack of relevance and understanding of needs

- Co-delivered workshops
 - Pharmacy academic plus counsellor/coach/Disability officer
- Focussed on main stressors
 - OSCEs
 - Professionalism
 - Work-life balance and time management
- Case studies and activities in pharmacy context

Mentoring exercise

- You are a peer mentor for other MPharm students
- A student asks to meet you for a coffee
- They report feeling very stressed and under pressure
- How might you support them and help them to identify sources of stress that are in their power to change?

M is a 2nd year MPharm student and asks you for some advice. She is worried about the exams coming up in 3 months time, as she was disappointed with how she did last year and doesn't want to let her family down. Every time she sits down to study she keeps thinking about her exams and struggles to focus. She is getting up early in the morning to revise before lectures, and studies until late at night as well. She never has any energy to go the gym so has stopped going, and her boyfriend of two years has just ended their relationship.

Barrier: Fitness to Practice Concerns

- Students concerned about impact of discussing and declaring mental health issues
- Supportive process developed with Year co-ordinators
- Myths about process discussed
- Signposting into support programme
- Ongoing welfare check-ins

Tailored vs. Population approach



Stepping-stone model to student support and development

Student Feedback

- **Relevant**

“Good that the workshops were tailored to needs of pharmacy students: OSCEs, interviews etc”

“They understood the course well and the needs of pharmacy students”

- **Time**

“I always feel guilty when I am not studying. Now I know that taking time out is actually ok – it is me being a professional”

Student feedback

- Stigma and perception of “I’m not bad enough”

“Knowing everyone feels the same way”

“I recognise I need to reach out more”

- Fitness to practice and professionalism

“...it is important to take care of yourself as a future healthcare professional in order to deliver the best possible service to patients...”

Key messages

- Benefits of developing population-based proactive approaches to wellbeing but activities need to be perceived as meaningful and relevant by students for them to prioritise and engage fully
- Collaborative approach between student support services, disability support and academics pivotal
- Open dialogue essential to reduce stigma of asking for help

References

- CAGE M.S, STOCK M., SHARPINGTON A., PITMAN E. and BATCHELOR E. (2020) Barriers to accessing support for mental health issues at university, *Studies in Higher Education*, 45:8, 1637-1649
- EVANS M., WARD N. (2018). Building resilience and improving wellbeing in pharmacy students: a collaborative approach. *University and College Counselling Journal*, 17 (1): 173 – 189