



Enhancing LGBTQ+ Medical Student Well-Being and Healthcare Utilization through the Development of a Peer Health Navigation Program: A Pilot Project

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Over 40% of LGBTQ+ medical students report concealing sexual identity due to fear of discrimination [1]
- Sexual minority medical students have increased rates of anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem and levels of burn-out relative to their heterosexual peers [2] [3]
- Peer navigation is well-established for enhancing well-being and health care utilization, and is a culturally responsive approach [4]

RESEARCH PURPOSES

1. Understand diverse health professional student barriers to care and needs for access to health and wellness resources
2. Obtain faculty and student input to and receptivity of developing a Peer Health Navigation (PHN) program.
3. Design PHN program to provide culturally competent health and resource navigation and emotional first-aid to students, considering the *intersection of racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and ableist bias*

RESEARCH METHODS

This project utilized multiple methods to understand the issues facing health professional students and to inform intervention development, which included:

- Faculty discussions identifying barriers to and considerations for medical students delivering peer support
- Conversations with leaders of student affinity groups to obtain their input on needs and program design
- Extend PHN applications to all medical students and identify their motivations for participating

METHODS and FINDINGS

Faculty and Student Wellness Leadership discussions for identifying potential barriers:

Student affinity group leader discussions for identifying health barriers and needs:

Applications for PHN interest:

- Students lack qualifications to provide mental health counseling directly to peers
- Program structure would need to reduce burden on peer navigators and facilitate self-care
- Students desire guidance from peers with similar lived experiences for accessing health services
- Recruited peer navigators should reflect diverse identity populations
- Student affinity groups provided input on gaps in and barriers to utilization of resources affecting their communities
- 50% of 30 PHN applicants indicated a special identification with/desire to support LGBTQIA+ peers

PROGRAM/COURSE DESIGN

A consensus was reached on program design and plans for training among student affinity group leaders, wellness leadership and faculty

- **Proposed Content for PHN Training:** Available institutional and community health and wellness resources; Mental Health First Aid; Culturally competent communication; Addressing confidentiality and privacy; LGBTQIA+ health, historic & present barriers to healthcare
- PHNs will learn how to assist students during designated office hours via a chat feature, phone calls, and emails
- **Scope of Practice:**
 - Navigating students to culturally responsive health services and wellness resources within the university and local community as well as provide immediate emotional support

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- Students are receptive to the PHN program
- Our PHN program offers a model that can be utilized by other medical campuses to make healthcare resources more accessible to students with multiple intersecting stigmatized identities
- Program training spans institutional health resources, culturally competent communication skills, contextualization of LGBTQIA+ experience in US healthcare, and basics in providing mental health first aid

NEXT STEPS/ FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Assess the self-efficacy of trained PHNs in providing empathetic and culturally competent communication and health navigation
- Obtain feedback via an anonymous survey circulated to support recipients
- Log focus of encounters
- Evaluations will inform program outcome success and future adaptations

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