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World Psychiatric Association (WPA) Position Statement: Promotion of Psychiatry among Medical Students // GA23.10.10

Purpose of Statement

This position statement focuses on the promotion of Psychiatry among medical students. A competent and resilient workforce is essential to the provision of mental health services to individuals with mental health illnesses. Promotion of mental health among medical students prepares the healthcare workforce to provide compassionate care and ends stigma towards mental health even if the healthcare providers are working in specialties other than psychiatry. This statement highlights some of the barriers to promoting psychiatry among medical students and identifies opportunities and practical recommendations. It will also provide recommendations at the individual, regional, national, and international levels to help spark initial interest and maintain students' interest in Psychiatry and Psychiatric subspecialties. These recommendations, if implemented, can also address the global shortage of psychiatrists, which is imperative to sustain and increase psychiatric workforce.

Authors

Dr. Salma Malik (USA)

Dr. Sadiq Naveed (USA)

Professor Muhammad Waqar Azeem (Qatar)

WPA Working Group on Medical Students

Background

Availability of mental health care is a global public health problem. COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for Psychiatrists and Psychiatry subspecialties. There is a critical workforce shortage that needs to be addressed with short-term and long-term interventions. Goldenberg et al mentioned in an article in American Journal of psychiatry that Psychiatry accounts for 5% of residency slots nationally, since 2011 only 50%–62% of these slots have been filled by graduates of U.S. medical schools. Similar concerns are shared globally as well. As far as interest of medical students in the field of Psychiatry is concerned, Lyons wrote an article in Academic Psychiatry discussing Impact of Psychiatry Clerkship on medical students where it showed that the properly structured Psychiatry clinical experience has a positive impact but also identified that it's difficult to maintain that interest after the clinical experience is over. It highlighted the importance of maintaining contact with students through other means such as mentorship, research, scholarly work collaboration and career guidance. Stigma reduction was another factor identified.

Factors affecting Awareness about Psychiatry

Psychiatry as a career choice and awareness of psychiatry is influenced by factors that can be premedical and intra-medical in origin. Stigma, burnout, and cultural attitudes towards psychiatry are potential factors that deter choosing psychiatry as a career choice. It also affects providing compassionate and quality care to individuals with psychiatric disorders. The supernatural and religion-magical factors are frequently conceptualized as the etiological factors for psychiatric disorders in different parts of the world. These beliefs and attitudes frequently stem from misperceptions about the scientific understanding and prognosis of psychiatric disorders. Moreover, these misperceptions result in a lack of prestige and respect, low salaries for healthcare providers, and unfavorable societal attitudes.

Recommendations

The following actions by various individual and organizational stakeholders to foster good mental health for people of working age are recommended by the WPA:

1. Thoughtful and well-designed curriculum and clinical interactions with patients can provide an opportunity to have meaningful exposure to the field.
2. Psychiatry has not been regarded as a mainstream specialty globally. It is critical to provide ample learning and clinical opportunities to break myths around psychiatry.
3. Psychiatry should be considered as a core specialty with adequate allocation of resources such as time spent in psychiatry in undergraduate and graduate medical education.
4. Addressing stigma through curriculum and improving student's perception of Psychiatry as a career is critical. The increased knowledge and improved perception can potentially lead to empathic and compassionate care to patients with psychiatric disorders.
5. Exposure to less acute patients who the students are able to interview to feel competent as well as seeing progressive improvement to observe recovery can improve the perception about the prognosis. Inpatient settings can be intimidating and stressful at this stage of the training.
6. Post clerkship engagement programs to captivate the initial interest in psychiatry can be helpful. Many institutions have created student interest groups with favorable outcomes.
7. Enthusiastic and positive mentorship and supervision can provide ongoing motivation, guidance and support. These mentors can also serve as role models.
8. Promoting Psychiatry as career choice which offers flexible hours as well as optimal work life balance.

Summary and Conclusions

Compassionate and resilient workforce ensures empathic and quality care to individuals with psychiatric disorders. Psychiatry is commonly disregarded as a career choice due to various factors such as misperception about psychiatric disorders and prognosis, burn out, lack of social prestige and significant stigma. Thoughtful and well-designed curriculum, adequate allocation of educational resources, post-clerkship engagement of medical students, and passionate mentors can play a pivotal role in

appreciation of psychiatry as a career choice. Moreover, exposure to psychiatry ensure quality of care among non-psychiatric healthcare providers.

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