

# Mental Health of Medical Students

Varshinee Sathyanarayanan.<sup>1</sup> 

## Abstract

In this Letter to the Editor, I respond to the article "A Cross-Sectional Institutional Survey of Depression, Suicidal Ideation, and Stigma in Medical Students" published in the IJMS. I appreciate how the authors have brought out the often-unspoken reality of mental health challenges within the medical student community. I discuss how medical school marks a significant turning point, not only in terms of academic rigor but also in the emotional and personal demands placed upon students. I call upon medical educators, administrators, and students to work together and create a more supportive and nurturing environment in medical education.

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the insightful article "A Cross-Sectional Institutional Survey of Depression, Suicidal Ideation, and Stigma in Medical Students"<sup>1</sup> published in the IJMS. The authors bravely address the often-unspoken reality of mental health challenges within the medical student community, a topic that deserves significantly more attention and open dialogue.

The journey to becoming a physician is typically paved with years of dedication, sacrifice, and unwavering passion. Entry into medical school marks a significant turning point, not only in terms of academic rigor but also in the emotional and personal demands placed upon students. The complex medical knowledge to be mastered can feel overwhelming, and the competitive environment can foster feelings of isolation and a constant need to prove oneself. Gruzmark and Reinders<sup>1</sup> provide compelling evidence of the high prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation among medical students. Their findings reveal that 22% of respondents reported moderate-to-severe depression, and a disturbing 7% endorsed suicidal ideation. These figures are significantly higher than those observed in the general population, underscoring the unique and intense stressors that medical students face. This growing trend is further supported by Peng et al.<sup>4</sup>, who, in their meta-analysis, found a 41% prevalence of depression and a 15% prevalence of suicidal ideation among medical students, particularly during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perhaps the most striking finding of Gruzmark and Reinders<sup>1</sup> is the persistence of stigma surrounding mental health in medical education. Despite growing awareness and efforts to destigmatize mental illness, a staggering 94% of respondents in their study believed that disclosing their struggles with depression on a residency application would be a risky endeavor.

This deeply ingrained fear of jeopardizing their future careers prevents students from seeking the help they desperately need. The consequences of this stigma include academic difficulties, burnout, social isolation, and even tragic outcomes.

The recommendations put forth by Gruzmark and Reinders<sup>1</sup> offer a roadmap for addressing this crisis. By providing medical students with access to a diverse range of mental health providers, promoting self-care practices, and encouraging the development of personal well-being goals, we can begin to create a more supportive and nurturing environment. Furthermore, we must actively challenge the prevailing culture of stoicism and perfectionism that often permeates medical training. As Rotenstein et al.<sup>5</sup> highlight, medical education often lacks adequate focus on self-care, stress management, and coping strategies. By integrating these essential skills into the curriculum, we can equip future physicians with the tools they need to thrive both personally and professionally. We must foster a culture of openness and support, where seeking help is seen as a sign of strength, not weakness. Peer support programs, as highlighted by Goldberg et al.<sup>2</sup>, can play a crucial role in reducing stigma and promoting help-seeking behaviors among medical students. By creating safe spaces for students to connect, share their experiences, and support one another, we can develop a sense of community and belonging.

The authors of this important study deserve our gratitude for bringing this critical issue to the forefront. Their work serves as a powerful call to action for medical educators, administrators, and students alike. We must work together to create a culture that prioritizes mental health and supports the well-being of those who dedicate their lives to healing others. Only then can we ensure that future generations of physicians are equipped to provide compassionate and effective care, both to their patients and to themselves.

<sup>1</sup> MB, BCh, BAO. University College Cork, Cork, Ireland.

**About the Author:** Varshinee Sathyanarayanan is an Academic Track Intern Doctor who has completed her first through fifth years of medicine at University College Cork, where she graduated with honors. She has received several major awards and achievements, including presentations at international conferences and multiple publications..

## Correspondence:

Varshinee Sathyanarayanan.

Address: [University College Cork College Road Cork Ireland Eircode: T12 K8AF]

Email: [varshinee25@gmail.com](mailto:varshinee25@gmail.com)

Submission: Jan 11, 2025

Revisions: Jul 28, 2025

Responses: Aug 2, 2025

Acceptance: Sep 3, 2025

Publication: Sep 4, 2025

Process: Peer-reviewed

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## Acknowledgments

None.

## Conflict of Interest Statement & Funding

The Authors have no funding, financial relationships or conflicts of interest to disclose.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization: VS. Formal Analysis: VS. Methodology: VS. Writing - Original Draft: VS. Writing - Review Editing: VS.

## Cite as

Sathyanarayanan V. Mental Health of Medical Students. *Int J Med Stud*. 2025 Jul-Sep;13(3):352-353.

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ISSN 2076-6327

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