

SUBJECT: Mental Health Counselors for Medical Students

SUBMITTED BY: Pennsylvania Osteopathic Family Physicians Society on behalf of Jaffri, OMS-III, Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine, and Amanda McMellon, OMS-III, Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine

REFERRED TO: 2021 American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (ACOF) Congress of Delegates

RESOLUTION NO. 17

1 WHEREAS, one third of medical students experience depression with low treatment rates¹; and
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3 WHEREAS, the prevalence of depression or depressive symptoms among medical students is 27.2% and
4 suicidal ideation is 11.1%²; and
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6 WHEREAS, approximately 50% of medical students experience burnout³; and
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8 WHEREAS, burnout and declining satisfaction are strongly associated with reductions in professional work
9 effort⁴; and
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11 WHEREAS, burnout can undermine medical students' professional development, place patients at risk and
12 contribute to suicidal ideation⁵; and
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14 WHEREAS, medical students are less likely to look after their personal concerns or to seek mental health
15 treatment due to fears of stigmatization, confidentiality and the impact such treatment may have on their
16 future careers⁶; and
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18 WHEREAS, medical students are three times more likely to commit suicide than the general population¹;
19 and
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21 WHEREAS, stress and depression are common in students, but two times more common in medical
22 students¹; and
23
24 WHEREAS, medical students are more susceptible to psychiatric stressors and, therefore, have alarming
25 rates of burnout, anxiety and depression⁷; and
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27 WHEREAS, depression is documented as one of the risk factors most likely to lead to suicidal thinking, and
28 studies have shown that many students are depressed when they die by suicide⁷; and
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30 WHEREAS, research of physicians' mental health has shown stresses that begin in medical school tend to
31 continue throughout the years of practicing medicine⁸; and
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33 WHEREAS, defenses and coping strategies used prior to medical school may be inadequate in the setting of
34 rigorous medical education⁸; and

35 WHEREAS, students with no prior mental health history may find themselves in need of psychotherapy and
36 medication management;⁸ and

37
38 WHEREAS, only 22% of depressed students used mental health counseling services. The most frequently
39 cited barriers to using these services were lack of time (48%), lack of confidentiality (37%), stigma
40 associated with using mental health services (30%), cost (28%), fear of documentation on academic record
41 (24%) and fear of unwanted intervention (26%)⁹; now, therefore be it

42
43 RESOLVED, that the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (ACOFP) encourage osteopathic
44 medical schools to have increased access to face-to-face and, when not available remote, mental health
45 services available to students; and, be it further

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47 RESOLVED, that the ACOFP encourage osteopathic medical schools to continue to abide by Health
48 Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
49 (FERPA) regulations in regards to counseling services provided to osteopathic medical students.

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FINAL ACTION: APPROVED as of March 10, 2021

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