

Measures of Empathy, Burnout and Emotional Intelligence in Pharmacy Students: Time for a Change?

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Measures of Empathy, Burnout and Emotional Intelligence in Pharmacy Students: Time for a Change?

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Introduction

Although burnout and loss of empathy have been thoroughly documented in physicians, residents and medical students, there is a paucity of data on these measures of well-being in pharmacy students. The purpose of this ongoing longitudinal study is to measure burnout, empathy and emotional intelligence longitudinally in students enrolled in a Doctor of Pharmacy program.

Methods

Three validated survey instruments were utilized, the Jefferson Scale of Empathy (JSE), the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI). The JSE is a measure on a scale of 1-120; The MBI has three categories: Professional Efficacy, Exhaustion and Cynicism. The ESCI measures 12 competencies on a 1 through 5 scale. These data represent program year (PY) 1 through 3 for the class of 2021.

Results

Of the 69 (72%) participating students, 56.5% were female and 43.5% male. A majority (84.1%) of the third year pharmacy students were burned out, defined as scoring in the highest category for either exhaustion or cynicism. In addition, a majority (66.7%) had low or moderate professional efficacy scores, a negative finding. All measures of student burnout increased from the start of pharmacy school through the start of year three: exhaustion: 14.4 +/- 7.4 to 20.7 +/- 6.2; cynicism: 6 (3-10) to 12 (7-18); and professional efficacy: 30 (26-33) to 27 (23-30), all $p < 0.0001$. The only ESCI competency that changed significantly over the three years was a decrease in Achievement Orientation (PY1: 4.5 (4-4.7); PY2: 4.2 (3.7-4.5) and PY3: 4.1 (3.7-4.5); $p=0.003$).

Discussion

The high level of burnout reported in this pharmacy student cohort is concerning. The high level of exhaustion speaks to a real possibility of a lack of well-being in many of these students. Remarkably, the average cynicism score doubled from the beginning of year one to year three. Emotional intelligence levels across twelve competencies were similar in males and females with the exception of teamwork where females scored higher.

Conclusion

There is a high level of burnout documented in this longitudinal study of pharmacy students. The current pharmacy educational process merits re-evaluation with increased attention to wellness.

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Percentage of Students in Each MBI Cynicism Category for Each Year

