Deidre Ledbetter

Mentor: Kelly Gable

Title: *Assessing the Impact of Mental Health First Aid Training within a Pharmacy Curriculum*

Abstract

Background: The public, including healthcare professionals, stigmatize mental illness every day. Much of the stigma and social distancing stems from a lack of education and low mental health literacy. In order to combat this stigma, educated healthcare professionals need to lead the way. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training teaches participants how to identify and understand a mental illness and provides the skills necessary to reach out, respond, and help someone who may be developing a mental health problem or experiencing a crisis. The Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) is a validated, 35-item survey used to assess mental health literacy, stigma, and social distance around individuals with mental illness.

Results: All (73) first-year pharmacy students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville were required to complete MHFA training as part of the curriculum and 65 participants completed the MHLS twice, as a pre-survey and post-survey. The difference in the total score (post-survey total score minus pre-survey total score) increased by an average of 12.1 ±10.7 points per participant. Over 90% (59/65) of participant's total score increased and 60% (39/65) of participant's scores increased by at least 10 points. Individual analysis of six questions revealed enhanced ability to identify mental illnesses, greater confidence in seeking information on mental health, reduced stigma, expanded mental health literacy, and lessened social distancing.

Conclusion: MHFA training is effective at improving mental health literacy, stigma, and social distance in first year pharmacy students and is capable of shifting the public perception of mental illness. Implementing MHFA training into healthcare curriculums could improve patient care while also supporting healthcare professionals as effective and influential leaders for the public.