



European Medical Students' Association

Association Européenne des Étudiants en Médecine

emsa-europe.eu | Rue Guimard 15, 1040 Brussels | info@emsa-europe.eu

This policy was adopted by the 8th EMSA Spring Assembly in Lisbon on 8th of May of 2022. Must be reconsidered until: 8th of May of 2026.

Well-being and Psychological Safety in Medical Education

Authors: Alexandra-Aurora Dumitra, Elena-Adelina Antofie, Zeynep Ayaydın, Ahmet Şimşek,
Yağmur Çabar, Dilge Kocabaş

The European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) represents medical students across Europe. We envision a healthy and solidary Europe in which medical students actively promote health. EMSA empowers medical students to advocate health in all policies, excellence in medical research, interprofessional healthcare education and the protection of human rights across Europe.

EMSA. HEALTH. EUROPE. TOGETHER.

Rue Guimard 15

1040 Brussels, Belgium

Tel : +32 2732 72 02

www.emsa-europe.eu

info@emsa-europe.eu

Problem statement.

Psychological safety (PS) ensures that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. If people are not afraid of expressing their opinions in teamwork, they will perform effectively. (Edmondson, 1999).

Medical education has produced limited formal literature defining the term or examining techniques for maximising PS in educational settings. We haven't fully captured the aspects of a safe environment for medical learners since medicine has created conceptions of safety by focusing on student mistreatment and its implications. (Tsuei, 2019). Rather, many academics have documented medical students' social, verbal, physical, and sexual maltreatment, as well as the ramifications for their well being. (Tsuei, 2019) However, PS endures different variables such as intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. In an education process where PS is not provided and medical students experience pressure to speak up, they aim not to be judged by their peers and educators instead of focusing on learning.

Additionally, high academic and professional expectations, a heavy workload, sleep deprivation, long hours, frequent exposure to stressful life situations, the transition from trainee to consultant, and the realities of clinical practice all contribute to lower levels of well-being, leading the students to feel ashamed, anxious, or inadequate in unsafe environments. (Hopkins, 2019) (Tsuei, 2019). Nevertheless, the definition of well-being is subjective and therefore complex.

Moreover, even if schools are involved in a specific national initiative to modernise medical education, “only 22% had any kind of competency” regarding wellbeing. (Vogel, 2018) This emphasis on how a healthy learning environment is commonly lacking in medical education appears to imply that eliminating these harmful activities will result in PS (Tsuei, 2019). Thus it is crucial to have international standards in this regard. Therefore, institutions should also take responsibility for implementing these standards.

Our view. Aim

We, as EMSA, acknowledge the importance of PS and the well-being of medical students and how lack of PS is detrimental to teamwork and can affect students' psychological health. In recent years research about PS and the well-being of medical students has increased. However, there are no established actions to protect the well-being of students, and no significant amount of steps have been taken by the authorities to reduce the factors that endanger PS in medical education. We believe that to ensure and maintain PS and the well-being of students, we have to focus on raising awareness. In addition to the direct benefit to the students, such actions will have a significant public health impact on patient care and the students' future clinical performance, thus serving the well-being of the entire society. We aim to guide institutions and associations to promote changes and additional training in the medical curriculum.

Recommendations

EMSA calls on Mental Health Europe to:

- To emphasise the necessity of well trained medical students and professionals in mental health concerns for the benefit of patient health and compliance with treatment
- To provide mental health services (such as therapy, focus groups) to medical students and professionals who are experiencing or on the verge of experiencing a mental health issue and need assistance.
- To push for the inclusion of mental health services in all clinical settings and medical schools.
- To maintain track of the above-mentioned mental health activities on a regional, national level and to communicate the content as well as feedback on the specific activities included in such reports, which will be revised and updated every working year or term.
- To promote awareness of circumstances in which doctors prone to burnout are misdiagnosing patients in healthcare settings, and to report such incidents to the appropriate authorities.

EMSA calls on the Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe (GAMIAN-Europe) to:

- To spread the word that mental illness may be adequately treated
- To assist in the formation, establishment, and development of representative patient organisations throughout Europe, as needed
- To lessen the stigma, discrimination, ignorance, and misunderstanding that surround mental illness
- To urge health workers who are showing early signs of burnout to seek professional help and stick to their treatment plans.
- EMSA calls on the hospital-related Human Resources Committee members and personnel to:
- To keep track of their workers' well-being through annual or monthly questionnaires or meetings that allow employees to submit feedback on the system's existing well-being measurements
- To provide employees with access to digital mental health care
- To encourage employees to participate in self-care activities such as exercising and pleasure reading

EMSA calls on World Health Organization (WHO) to:

- To provide an annual report containing a database containing statistics on doctors who showed signs of poor mental health that had a significant impact on their performance during the previous working year.
- To assist in the organisation of events involving medical schools and faculties in which students should be taught the fundamental principles of mental disease, as well as how to recognize symptoms early and recognize when they have an impact on their clinical judgement.

EMSA calls on Medical Schools and University Hospitals to:

- To undergo routine screening and prevention studies for medical students
- To organise and facilitate trainings on mental health and coping matters such as Effective time management, stress coping techniques, relaxation and mindfulness-based training.

EMSA . HEALTH . EUROPE . TOGETHER.

- To adjust the curriculum to include student guidance on managing their own and the patients' mental health and well-being.
- To ensure counselling systems that provide one-on-one communication with Students.
- To create an environment where students can talk about their mental health and nonjudgmentally seek help when in need, while also addressing the stigma.
- To create and support a student wellness committee.

References

1. Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
2. Hopkins, L., Morgan, H., Buery-Joyner, S. D., Craig, L. B., Everett, E. N., Forstein, D. A., Graziano, S. C., Hampton, B. S., McKenzie, M. L., Page-Ramsey, S. M., Pradhan, A., Bliss, S., & Undergraduate Medical Education Committee, Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics (2019). To the Point: a prescription for well-being in medical education. *American journal of obstetrics and gynecology*, 221(6), 542-548. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajog.2019.05.012>
3. Tsuei, S. H., Lee, D., Ho, C., Regehr, G., & Nimmon, L. (2019). Exploring the Construct of Psychological Safety in Medical Education. *Academic medicine : journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 94(11S Association of American Medical Colleges Learn Serve Lead: Proceedings of the 58th Annual Research in Medical Education Sessions), S28-S35. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002897>
4. Vogel L. (2018). Medical education needs reform to improve student well-being and reduce burnout, say experts. *CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association journal = journal de l'Association medicale canadienne*, 190(48), E1426-E1427. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-5685>