

Depressed Med Students Concerned About Stigma

BY ROBERT FINN

FROM JAMA

A survey of more than 700 medical students found that 14% were moderately or severely depressed. Those depressed students were significantly more likely than students who were not depressed to express concern about stigmas associated with depression, according to the survey.

For example, 53% of the students with moderate to severe depression agreed with the statement, "Telling a counselor I am depressed would be risky," compared with 17% of students with no or minimal depression.

The results come from a survey of all 769 students enrolled at the medical school of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in September-November 2009. Of the students surveyed, 505 (66%) responded, reported Dr. Thomas L. Schwenk and his colleagues at the university (JAMA 2010;304:1181-90).

First- and second-year students were no more likely than third- or fourth-year students to report moderate to severe depression (13% vs. 15%). But significantly more women than men scored in the moderate to severe range (18% vs. 9%).

Third- and fourth-year students with moderate to severe depression were more likely to report suicidal ideation

than were first- and second-year students (7.9% vs. 1.4%).

Significant differences were found between students with moderate to severe depression and those with no or minimal depression on several other stigma-related statements. For example, 62% of the students with moderate to severe depression, compared with 34% of those with no or minimal depression, agreed with the statement, "If I were depressed and asked for help, I would be admitting that my coping skills are inadequate."

Depressed students also expressed significantly more concern about being less competitive in their residency applications.

On the other hand, 86% of students with moderate to severe depression disagreed with the statement, "Medical students with depression are dangerous to their patients," compared with 74% of students with no or minimal depression who disagreed with that statement. The difference was statistically significant.

"These results suggest that new approaches may be needed to reduce the stigma of depression and to enhance its prevention, detection, and treatment," the investigators wrote.

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