

MENTAL HELP SUPPORT FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS: INSIGHTS FROM THE TOP FIVE UNIVERSITIES IN POLAND

Mateusz Guziak,^{1,2} Maciej Walkiewicz,¹

¹Medical University of Gdańsk, Faculty of Health Sciences with the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine, Division of Quality of Life Research, Gdansk, Poland

²University of Belgrade, Faculty of Medicine, Laboratory for strengthening the health system and workforce for health equity, Belgrade, Serbia

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Background: The literature indicates that medical students in Poland, much like their counterparts globally, face higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression compared to the general population. Because of stigma and confidentiality concerns, they tend to avoid seeking help, which delays timely and appropriate support. Moreover, the availability of mental health support (MHS) for medical students remains an ongoing issue.

Methods and Objectives: The study focused on assessing the availability of Mental Health Services (MHS) at the top five universities in Poland offering MD programs, as per the 2023 Perspektywy University Ranking: Jagiellonian University Medical College (KR), Medical University of Warsaw (WA), Wrocław Medical University (WR), Medical University of Gdańsk (GD), and Medical University of Łódź (LD). Our analysis involved the examination of information pertaining to MHS on the official university websites. Furthermore, during the academic year 2022/2023, a concise, open-ended questionnaire regarding the availability of MHS was dispatched to the Dean's offices of the aforementioned universities.

Results: All universities offer free MHS in Polish and English, and WR additionally in German. Most programs provide hybrid support. MHS consists of short-term interventions and is limited to five hours per student in LD, and three visits per student in WR. Other forms of support include well-being programs like coaching, psychoeducation, biofeedback training, stress management training, mindfulness sessions, and yoga. Two universities reported an increased demand for psychological support due to COVID-19.

Conclusions: All major medical universities in Poland offer mental health support (MHS); however, the extent of their services varies. To optimize the impact of these programs, it is imperative to institute quality standards and ensure sustainable funding. Further investigation is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the provided MHS. Implementing comprehensive MHS in medical education institutions is crucial for the well-being of future healthcare professionals.

Keywords: mental health, wellbeing, medical education, medical students, stress management