An Assessment of Barriers to Mental Health Treatment Among College Students and Recommendations for Improving Access and Availability

IPE HEALTH EXPO:
Health Care and Quality

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Overview

In 2017, only 34% of college students with a diagnosed mental illness utilized treatment services (1). Some of the most commonly reported barriers to college students receiving treatment are perceived stigma, a lack of time, cost, a lack of knowledge of resources, a preference to handle the problem on their own, and a misperception about the seriousness of their mental health condition (2). To address these barriers, our team analyzed the mental health services that are currently offered at Grand Valley State University through the lens of public health, dentistry, kinesiology, and medicine. Through the integration of our different areas of expertise, we developed recommendations for increased integration of mental health education into the curriculum, broader access to digital mental health resources, and development of peer support networks.

Background

Social Determinants of Health- Healthcare and Quality
Social determinants of health are conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health and quality-of life-risks and outcomes (3). Some of these factors include income, race, education, and location.

What is the problem?
An estimated 1 in 3 students meet the criteria for a clinically significant mental health problem (1). 75% of all mental health disorders present by age 24 (5). In 2016, the WHO reported that suicide is the second leading cause of death worldwide among 15-29 year olds (6). Some of the most common mental health disorders among college students are: anxiety disorders (11.9%), depression (7% - 9%), eating disorders (9.5%), alcohol use disorders (1 in 5), and drug use disorders (1 in 20) (7). A 2018 - 2019 survey by the Healthy Minds Network found that only 43% of college students, who had a positive depression or anxiety screen, sought mental health treatment within the past 12 months (8). Each individual has a unique cultural background which can impact their experience with a mental health disorder (9).

Why does it matter?
Mental health disorders are associated with an increased risk of onset of chronic health conditions such as stroke, heart disease, diabetes, and asthma (10). Additionally, other long term consequences of mental health disorders that begin in early adulthood are relationship dysfunction, college dropout, and increased rates of unemployment (11). Mental health problems can also lead to decreased academic performance (12). Provision of adequate mental health services can benefit society as a whole through improved economic productivity (13). Culturally and contextually tailored treatment services are needed to address the unique needs of a diverse population (9).

How does IPE play a role in this issue?
IPE plays a role in mental healthcare access because if individuals are unable to receive care then they will have diminished health in other areas of their life. For public health, this means if a person is too depressed to attend work then they will not have money to pay for care or could lose their health insurance. For medical, if an individual is depressed they may not eat healthy foods or get exercise which could result in heart disease or diabetes. For dental, if an individual is depressed and not eating healthy foods, they could develop cavities and infections which could cause additional medical issues.

(4)

Key Findings

Current Grand Valley State University Programs

University Counseling Center
- Individual and free group therapy provided for all students.
- Self-help resources and GV Mental Health App.
- Emergency crisis services.
- Peer educator program and outreach events.
- Alcohol/drug awareness and education.
- Black student support services to help connect students with resources for coping with racial violence and trauma.
- Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center.

CARE Team
- Recieves referalls regarding students who might be struggling with family, personal, health, or resource needs.

Recreation and Wellness
- Provides resources to students centered around 8 dimensions of wellness.
- Mental Health and Well-Being Index.
- Employee wellness ambassadors who encourage a healthy work environment and culture.
- Massage therapy at a discounted rate for students.

Physical Wellness	• Alcohol & Other Drugs Services • Athletic & Rec Facilities • Campus Dining	• Campus Health Center • GV Family Health Center • Recreation & Wellness • Replenish
Environmental Wellness	• Accessible Restroom & Wellness Rooms • Division of Inclusion & Equity	• Housing & Residence Life • Office of Multicultural Affairs • Office of Sustainability Practices
Social Wellness	• Campus Interfaith • Housing & Residence Life • Kirkhof Center	• Laker Link • LGBT Resource Center • Recreation & Wellness • Office of Student Life
Financial Wellness	• Career Center • Handshake • Money Smart Lakers	• Office of Financial Aid • Replenish • Student Employment
Occupational Wellness	• Academic Advising • Career Center • Community Service Learning Center	• Office of Student Life • Student Employment
Intellectual Wellness	• Academic Advising • Center for Women & Gender Equity • Laker Link	• Student Academic Success Center • Tutoring & Writing Centers • University Libraries
Emotional Wellness	• LGBT Resource Center • Recreation & Wellness	• Student Organizations and Clubs • University Counseling Center
Spiritual Wellness	• Campus Interfaith Resources • Interfaith Reflection Rooms	• Laker Link • Office of Student Life

Current Barriers and Missed Opportunities

Stigma
Although GVSU offers many mental health programs for students to take advantage of, many students may still feel uncomfortable seeking or asking for help.

Time
To receive mental health care, students may be put on a waiting list to receive services. In addition, these appointments often require the student to take time out of their schedule which may be full of classes and work.

Cost
After the free therapy sessions, students will have to pay out of pocket for therapy. If they do not have insurance or have insurance that covers very little, they will not be able to access mental health services. Additionally, students who do not live close to campus will have to pay more for transportation to campus to receive services.

Limited Knowledge of Resources
Students comfortable seeking help may still have difficulty accessing resources because of limited knowledge. In addition, students may have difficulty attempting to figure out what services they are and are not eligible for.

Individual Disease Management or Denial of Problem
Students with mental health problems may try to treat their own issues by self medicating with drugs or alcohol. They may also seek help from friends or family who are not knowledgable in mental health treatment. In addition, they could attempt to ignore the problem entirely while it worsens.

Programs Offered at Other Universities

Wayne State University
- Mental health day to encourage students to focus on their health and emotional well-being.

Michigan State University
- Free delivery of prescriptions within 30 miles of campus from the on-site pharmacy.
- Free nutritional counseling services for all students.
- Peer Body Project: small group workshops to challenge cultural standards of female beauty and improve body acceptance.

University of Michigan
- Next available therapy appointment tracker allows students to see how soon they can get an appointment with a therapist.
- Gender affirming services for trans/nonbinary students.
- Trauma informed services for survivors of sexual violence.
- Depression treatment program specifically for men.

University of California, Santa Barbara
- Dog therapy days.

Colorado State University
- Still Point Reflection Space: a place for silent meditation, prayer, or reflection.

New York Institue of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine
- Running with the VP, Walking with Dean: students had the opportunity to exercise with school leadership and discuss current issues in healthcare.

Recommendations

Stigma
- Stigma is highest among students who are male, Asian, international, or come from a religious or poor family (14).
- When developing mental health services, GVSU needs to be aware of students who fall into one or more of these categories. To do this, programs should lead with an inclusive environment open to all genders, races, and religions. They should also focus on providing services to Asian and international students by using promotional material that is representative of these student groups.

Time
- Dedicated wellness time that is blocked off by advisors when working with students in creating their semester schedules.
- All university students can use this time to participate in wellness programs, individual stress management, or mindfulness. Students may have the option to opt-out of the program, however, it is encouraged to promote engagement in the program.
- Online appointment scheduling and ability to view next available appointment for the University Counseling Center.
- Utilizing services such as BetterHelp, which are available 24/7, so that students who work or attend class during the day can access mental health professionals at their convenience.
- Having therapy dogs on campus could help to reduce the time and cost associated with regular counseling appointments (15). However, they should not been seen as a replacement for traditional therapy but as a supplement.

Cost
- Clear schedule of costs associated with additional services offered by referral providers.
- On campus, GVSU offers students a limited amount of free counseling sessions. Afterwards, students must pay using insurance or pay 60% of regular cost. To help students keep costs down, GVSU could partner with nearby counseling offices to offer students a discounted rate with a wider range of therapists.
- Similar to MSU's program, offer students free medication delivery.

Limited Knowledge of Resources
- GVSU could complete an ongoing survey of students' current mental health knowledge and anticipated future needs. At the end of the survey, students would receive a list of current resources.
- Integration of a wellness program into the curriculum to help promote mental health literacy and wellness (16). This could consist of group discussions, activities, and presentations. Could be structured as "opt-out" in order to encourage participation.
- Increased faculty and teaching assistant awareness training for identifying concerning mental health behaviors in students (18).
- Students presenting with mental health concerns in the classroom are offered information and resources by faculty members.

Self Disease Management or Denial of Illness
- Increase mental health literacy through a wellness program which will help to inform students about topics such as depression, anxiety, stress, and when it is important to seek help (17).
- Create awareness about various mental health treatment options such as: therapy, support groups, stress management, and improper care, such as using drugs, alcohol, or ignoring the problem.
- Encourage participation in individual empowerment programs that allow students to connect with peers who might be experiencing similar problems (19).

Brainstorming Rules

1. **Encourage wild ideas**. (If none of the ideas sound a bit ridiculous, then you are filtering yourself too much.)
2. **Defer judgment.** (This can be as direct as harsh words or as subtle as a condescending tone or talking over one another.)
3. **Build on the ideas of others**. ("I want to build on that idea" or the use of "yes, and...")
4. **Stay focused on the topic at hand.**
5. **Be nice to your fellow brainstormer!**
6. **Be visual.** (Draw and upload and/or show ideas whenever possible.)
7. **Go for quantity.** (Add as many ideas as you can think of)

3- 5 min | 50+ People | Beginner

BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS

How Might We...	How Might We...	How Might We...	How Might We...	How Might We...
Remove the barrier of stigma	Remove the barrier of time	Remove the barrier of cost	Remove the barrier of limited knowledge about resources	Remove the barrier of self management and denial of illness or severity

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