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THE PANDEMIC'S BLOW TO MENTAL HEALTH IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

EL GOLPE DE LA PANDEMIA A LA SALUD MENTAL EN ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS

Lacuta - Borda R^{1a}

I have read carefully and with great interest, the article called Anxiety level of first-year medical students from a private university in Peru in times of Covid-19 ⁽¹⁾ by Saravia-Bartra et al. published in the journal of the Facultad de Medicina Humana URP where the grade of anxiety present among freshman medical students of a private university is presented. Let me complement the information given in this new article by exposing some factors that can predispose to this condition.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major threat to the physical and mental health and well-being of entire societies that have been severely affected by this crisis, and this is a priority that must be urgently addressed. Adversities related to socioeconomic consequences, fear of the virus, and its spread, as well as the associated concerns, have a significant impact on mental health and this may be greater in certain groups such as medical students and may be aggravated by different factors.

Tian-Ci et al. ⁽²⁾ analyzed data from sixty-nine studies including 40,348 medical students, in which the prevalence of anxiety was 33.8% among medical students globally, significantly higher than the general population. Fear of delaying completion of medical school and compromising their medical training was found to be a factor associated with the development of symptoms of moderate to severe depression, anxiety, and distress. Concerns about future career disruption, little interaction with medical faculty, and disruption of ongoing extracurricular activities were prevalent among medical students, underscoring the considerable uncertainty amid the COVID-19 pandemic⁽³⁾.

Nevertheless, Halperin et al. ⁽⁴⁾ found that preclinical students had a higher prevalence of depression and anxiety, possibly due to relocation, uncertainty associated with exam dates, distractions at home, and less experience in medical school.

Factors such as lack of family economic stability were also linked to the development of moderate-severe depressive and anxiety symptoms⁽⁵⁾.

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For this reason, it is important that medical school leaders take steps to remove the stigma of mental illness and promote help-seeking behaviors when students are stressed and anxious, as high levels of anxiety can affect negatively academic performance.

Universities must adopt public policies of monitoring or tutoring through psychotherapy, allowing students to have psychological coping strategies that they use in the event of a crisis that may arise, as well as the necessary emotional support.

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