



## **Mentorship and Medical Student Wellness: A Qualitative Analysis of Accessing Mental Health Care Services in Ontario Medical Students**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

**Background:** High levels of burnout, anxiety, and depression among medical trainees are linked to reduced workplace productivity, empathy, and professionalism. Medical students frequently do not access mental health resources, citing limited time, and concerns regarding confidentiality, cost, and stigma. This data is almost entirely international. Considering the diversity in medical education between countries, this study aims to identify perceived barriers and facilitators for accessing mental health resources by Ontario medical students.

**Methods:** Between May 2019 and March 2020, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 24 medical students from the 6 Ontario medical programs. To date, 16 medical students were included in this partial analysis. Students were purposively sampled for year of training, perceived stress levels, and experiences in accessing wellness resources. A descriptive thematic approach was used for qualitative analysis. Interview questions focused on identifying barriers and facilitators for maintaining wellness and suggestions for wellness improvement.

**Results:** Two main themes were identified: barriers to accessing care and maintaining wellness. Students identified mental health resource barriers that included inflexible leave of absence policies, remote locations, frequent travel, and time constraints. Stigma, confidentiality, and fear of career consequences were frequently cited as factors influencing access to care. Notably, mentorship from preceptors was identified as instrumental in supporting medical students' decisions to utilize mental health resources. Preceptor-to-student mentorship was emphasized by rural students, particularly during rural placements distanced from their primary campus and social supports.

**Conclusion:** Positive relationships with mentors facilitated student access to mental health services, possibly by breaking down barriers of stigma, confidentiality, and fear of career consequences. Preceptors encouraging students to access mental health resources appears to establish confidence in these decisions. This perceived facilitator extends to northern medical students studying in rural communities. The identified barriers and facilitators to student wellness will be further explored in a province-wide survey.