

WORKSHOP REPORT

The Postgraduate Exploring and Managing Stress Workshop

Muhamad Saiful Bahri Yusoff

Medical Education Department, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Context

Postgraduate medical training environment has always been regarded as highly stressful environment to students. Excessive and chronic exposure to stress associated with negative consequences to the mental, emotional and physical health has been described in many studies. Several medical education constituencies have emphasized the importance of teaching stress-management and self-care skills to postgraduate students. Although there is large literature on stress management in general, their specific application to medical education has been largely unexplored. To fill this gap, we describe in this article a stress-management program for postgraduate students known as the 'Postgraduate Exploring and Managing Stress Workshop' in our institution.

Reason for the idea

This workshop was developed to enhance postgraduate students' self-awareness towards the importance of stress management, and to assist them in developing self-improvement strategies to develop their skills in handling stress. It offers a unique opportunity to develop postgraduate students' skills in such areas.

Methods

The workshop was run over one day. It was open to postgraduate students. The programme was run by academic staff from the Medical Education Department. The objectives of this first session were to enable participants to measure their stress levels by 12 items General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), to recognize the main stressors that they are facing by Postgraduate Stressor Questionnaire (PSQ) and to identify their main coping styles by Brief COPE questionnaire. Participants were given some input regarding the problems related to stress in postgraduate study as well as future specialist, the models of stress, and the relationship between stress level, stressors and coping methods. Hands-on and discussion sessions were held to explore practical part of

stress management. After they went through the sessions, they should be able to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses and develop their own self-improvement strategies to improve their resistance to stressors.

Evaluation

A total of 37 postgraduate students participated in the workshop. At the end of the workshop, evaluation questionnaires were distributed to participants. The questionnaire solicited participants' ratings regarding the usefulness of the three questionnaires, the discussion sessions and the facilitators. Participants were also asked to rate the success of the workshop in achieving the objectives and its overall usefulness. In an open-ended section participants were asked to describe the most important thing they learnt from the workshop as well as the most important thing that can be improved. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 12. The evaluation showed that the participants rated the overall workshop as highly useful (86.9%) and as having achieved the objectives (86.2%). All sessions were rated as highly useful. Among the comments written in the open-ended section regarding the most important thing participants learnt from the workshop, 45% wrote comments related to improved self-awareness. The importance of positive coping skills was commented by 25.5% of them. The fact that stress is related to one's perception was mentioned as most important by 15.5% and another 14% appreciated the usefulness of increased knowledge such as identification of stressors and coping strategies.

Corresponding Author: Dr Muhamad Saiful Bahri bin Yusoff, Lecturer, Department of Medical Education, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 16150 Kubang Kerian, Kelantan, Malaysia.

Email: msaiful@kb.usm.my