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'the Wounded Healer': an Effective Anti-stigma Intervention Targeted at the Medical Profession?

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Introduction:

Despite the perception that doctors should be 'invincible', mental illness is common in this population. Doctors and medical students have low levels of help-seeking for their own mental health problems often only presenting to mental health services once a crisis arises. Fear of exposure to stigmatization is a crucial factor to symptom concealment.

'The Wounded Healer' is an anti-stigma intervention that has been described as an innovative method of pedagogy that blends science with the humanities. The Wounded Healer has been delivered to more than 5000 medical students and doctors in countries all over the world.

Methods:

We conducted a cross-sectional, mixed methods study. Immediately following the intervention we distributed paper questionnaires to participants who attended the Wounded Healer that contained stigma constructs. Answers were on a Likert-type scale and there was also space for free-text comments.

Results:

303/378 (80%) of participants recruited for the study responded. 246/303 (81%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the talk made them more accepting of medics suffering from psychopathology. 223/303 (73%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they were more aware of the importance of engaging in help-seeking behavior when under mental distress.

Many respondents reported in the free-text comments that the Wounded Healer was inspirational and that every medical student should receive this intervention.

Discussion:

A majority of respondents responded positively to the stigma constructs. This may have implications for medical students and doctors in mental distress by helping to reduce stigma and by encouraging help-seeking behavior.