

---

**TACKLING THE STIGMA TOWARDS MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS: IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW PROGRAMME TO ADDRESS AN OLD ETHICAL PROBLEM.**

---

M. Xavier<sup>1</sup>, P. Mateus<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mental Health, Faculdade Ciências Médicas Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

---

**Introduction:** Negative attitudes towards mental illness or the psychiatrist's role have repeatedly been reported in the literature among pregraduate medical students. Although a clerkship may improve the student's attitudes, negative perceptions regarding mental illness remained unchanged in about one-third of the students. When recovery is being assumed as a central concept of care, the presence of stigma among students represents an ethical challenge that the medical schools cannot avoid.

**Objectives:** to implement a programme aiming i. to assess the stigma towards mental illness among pregraduate medical students, and ii. to tackle negative attitudes regarding mental illness and psychiatry.

**Methods:** The authors, targeting the 6<sup>th</sup> year medical students, have developed a one half-day program to be held before the 4-weeks psychiatric clerkship. The program offers sequentially an initial overview about the concept of stigma, several examples from experiences reported by patients, videos and role-playing exercises. Attitudes towards mental illness were assessed by the Kassam's et al *Mental Illness: Clinicians' Attitudes Scale MICA-2*' self-reported questionnaire.

**Results:** 106 students were evaluated. The acceptance was very good, with no refusals to participate in the program. After the clerkship, perceptions about patients' dangerousness, the need for social protection, the assets and the role of psychiatry were significantly improved.

**Conclusions:** The good acceptance from the students and the preliminary results were very encouraging, suggesting that this program could change attitudes towards mental illness favorably. Given we've just evaluated a time span of one month, further studies are needed to assess the temporal stability of the changes.