Increasing Medical Student Confidence in Identifying Suicidal Patients and Accessing Resources for Intervention
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Rationale/Need

- Suicide is the tenth overall leading cause of death in the United States and the second leading cause of death of people between 10-34 years old.1
- While suicide rates continue to climb, it remains that patients who attempt or complete suicide are more likely to have had contact with their PCP than with a mental health specialist in the month before2, which presents the opportunity for early intervention by medical students and general providers.
- We first recognized the need for targeted training for suicide assessment and management when medical student volunteers at Greenville Community Shelter Clinic expressed uncertainty in how to approach these patients.
- We felt that it would be beneficial for all students at Brody to receive additional training in suicide risk recognition and evaluation for application at the shelter clinic and as rotating medical students and physicians.

Methods

- First and second year medical students at Brody School of Medicine were offered the opportunity to attend a one hour lunch training session with speaker Kevin Parker, a behavioral health coordinator and licensed clinical social worker at Access East.
- The training objectives included understanding risk factors, identifying at-risk patients, interacting with suicidal patients, and understanding local resources for short-term and long-term interventions.
- Students were given a pre- and post-survey asking them to assess their level of confidence regarding the above objectives on a scale of 1 to 4.
- We compared the confidence rating before and after the training to assess whether the improvement was statistically significant using a one-tailed t-test with a p-value set at 0.05.

Results

- Using a one tailed t-test with a p-value set at 0.05, each of the following questions showed statistically significant improvement in confidence level at a confidence interval of 95%: confidence in recognizing risk factors for suicide, identifying a suicidal patient, knowledge of resources for immediate help in suicidal crisis, and knowledge of resources for long term help for suicidal patients.
- There was not a statistically significant change in confidence in discussing suicidal ideations with patients.

Conclusions and Potential Impact

- A majority of attendees reported that the information presented in the training is applicable to experiences as a medical student now and to future practice as a physician.
- The training was effective in achieving 4 of the 5 objectives, but did not produce a significant increase in student-reported confidence discussing suicidal ideation with patients.
- Future sessions could include a secondary training with incorporation of standardized patients to allow students to apply interview skills and practice having these difficult conversations.
- The one-hour session requires a minimal time investment but produces a beneficial increase in confidence in applicable skills for medical students now and in the future.

References


Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jessica Tucci-Herron and Adeola Keku for help organizing and co-hosting this training. Additional thanks to Maudia Ahmed, Shantell Creek, and Kevin Parker of Access East for leading the training and providing educational materials.