



*Evaluating the Effectiveness of Physician
Assistants as Mental Health First Aid
Instructors: Outcomes of the Mental Health
Outreach Fellowship*

Jennifer Forbes, MHS, PA-C
Caroline Pierce
Lynette Sappe-Watkins, CFRE

Background

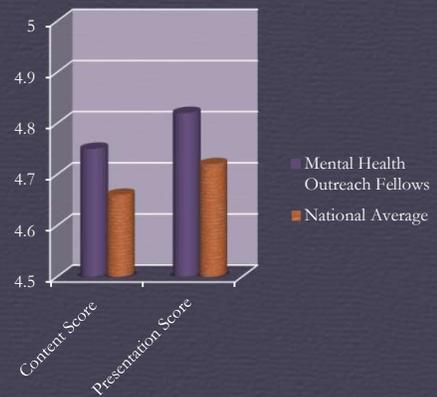
- ❖ Nearly half of adults will experience a mental health disorder during their lifetime¹
- ❖ The number of individuals who seek treatment is concerning with only 41% receiving professional healthcare or other services²
- ❖ Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an international evidence-based course
 - ❖ Designed to help the general public acquire the knowledge and skills needed to respond to a person in a mental health emergency and offer support to someone in emotional distress
 - ❖ Shown to increase mental health literacy, increase supportive behaviors towards individuals with mental health problems, decrease stigmatizing attitudes, and improve mental health in those who attend the MHFA course
- ❖ In 2018 the PA Foundation launched the Mental Health Outreach Fellowship
 - ❖ Goal - connect PAs' clinical expertise and compassion to the mental health needs in their local communities

Methods

- ❖ 16 PAs were selected as Mental Health Outreach Fellows
 - ❖ Conducted outreach in their communities as MHFA instructors over a one-year period
- ❖ Upon completion of each MHFA class, course participants completed a course evaluation
 - ❖ Course content
 - ❖ Instructor presentation
- ❖ Mental Health Outreach Fellows submitted all course evaluations at the conclusion of the fellowship year
- ❖ Mean evaluation scores were calculated and compared to the national mean for all MHFA instructors
 - ❖ Course content
 - ❖ Instructor presentation

Results

- ❖ MHFA training was provided to 1,595 community participants
- ❖ 116 MHFA courses taught by the Mental Health Outreach Fellows
- ❖ 14 Fellows completed the fellowship
 - ❖ Instructor evaluation reports from the fellowship period were collected
- ❖ Evaluation report scoring
 - ❖ Likert scale 1 – 5 (5 corresponded to strongly agree)
 - ❖ **Fellows** - mean instructor presentation score was 4.82, course content score was 4.75
 - ❖ **National** - mean for instructor presentation was 4.72, course content score was 4.66
- ❖ The Fellows had a higher mean for both content and instructor presentation than the national average
 - ❖ Difference wasn't statistically significant



MHFA Course Evaluation Participant Feedback

One of the best courses I have ever taken, can't wait to tell others about this class	Will be a tremendous asset in my daily job role and personal life
Thoughtful and informative course, full of activities	Course was easy to follow and practical
Very engaging and collaborative course	Instructor was open, receptive, and encouraging of student stories and participation
Provides vital information to help people with mental health issues	The instructor's passion about mental health was conveyed throughout the presentation
Excellent content and activities	Great job of presenting difficult topics
Loved how the instructor used personal experience to give examples and insight	I have never felt more engaged and interested in an all-day training
Instructor had a great healthcare background and was very knowledgeable	Strengths of the course were the instructor's interactions with the class and unbiased presentation of the information

MHFA Training for PA Students

- ❖ 435 PA students received MHFA training during the fellowship year
 - ❖ 99.3% of the PA students trained said the MHFA course was a valuable and applicable addition to their education
- ❖ Medical and PA students are at increased risk for depression^{3,4}
 - ❖ Can lead to negative outcomes for the student
 - ❖ Increased failure rates
 - ❖ Withdrawal or dismissal from the PA program
- ❖ Could be added to a behavioral health course during the didactic year

Conclusions

- ❖ The PAs selected for the Mental Health Outreach Fellowship were effective MHFA instructors
- ❖ There are numerous benefits to having a PA serve as the MHFA course instructor
 - ❖ Having a positive impact on their local community by increasing the mental health literacy of the public
 - ❖ Reducing the stigma associated with mental illness
 - ❖ Increasing visibility and promotion of the PA profession
 - ❖ Enhancement of a PAs individual career through education and service
 - ❖ Bring a unique background and training to the role of MHFA instructor

Fellowship Expansion

- ❖ Community college initiative
 - ❖ Training faculty and staff in MHFA
 - ❖ Gives the Fellows an opportunity to reach the population that is most vulnerable to developing a mental disorder
 - ❖ Can result in earlier identification and treatment
 - ❖ Lessening the long-term effect of a mental disorder on a person's relationships, education, and career

References

1. Kessler RC, Berglund PA, Demler O, Jin R, Walters EE. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R) Archives of General Psychiatry. 2005; 62, 593-602
2. Wang PS, Berglund P, Olfson M, Pincus HA, Wells KB, Kessler RC. Failure and delay in initial treatment contact after first onset of mental disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. Archives of General Psychiatry. 2005; 62, 603-613
3. Rotenstein LS, Ramos MA, Torre M, et al. Prevalence of Depression, Depressive Symptoms, and Suicidal Ideation Among Medical Students: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *JAMA*. 2016;316(21):2214–2236. doi:10.1001/jama.2016.17324
4. Cocke KD, Klocko DJ, Kindratt TB. Screening for Undetected Depression in Physician Assistant Students. *J Physician Assist Educ*. 2019;30(2):118–121.

Acknowledgements : The PA Foundation provided funding for the MHFA instructor training of the Mental Health Outreach Fellows