

Abstract

Background:

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence-based program aimed to teach individuals skills and knowledge to adequately respond and identify mental illness signs, crisis, and substance use disorders. MHFA is especially beneficial in the field of pharmacy as pharmacists are a significant public health resource. Pharmacists need to recognize crisis symptoms, be able to engage the patient and direct them to appropriate help. The purpose of the study is to assess the benefits of MHFA training in pharmacy students by evaluating the student's retention and utilization of skills at the 6 and 12 month mark from their training date.

Methods:

This research survey obtained local institutional review boards for approval. The surveys were developed and distributed via Qualtrics. Two surveys were distributed at the 6 and 12 month mark from the student's MHFA training date. Surveys assessed the student's retention and utilization of skills, demographic of those they demonstrated skills on, interests in future topics and personal experience. The study included SIUE SOP students from the class of 2023 who took MHFA training their P1 year. Descriptive statistics were used for statistical analysis such as percentages, means and modes.

Results:

Overall, 66 students were included in the 6 month survey and 64 participants in the 12 month survey. Retention of skills such as listening nonjudgmentally and giving reassurance remained consistent at the 6 and 12 month mark. There was a small decrease in encouraging both appropriate, professional help, self-help and other strategies from 4.14 to 3.89. The largest confidence level drop was in assessing suicide risk from 3.25 to 2.25. There was an increase in students reporting they had experienced a mental health problem from 38 (57.58%) at 6 months to 42 (65.63%) at 12 months. Students reported being most confident in educating patients on mental health problems such as anxiety and depression at both surveys for a total range of 35-38%. There was an overall increase in students who had reported utilizing the skills or information taught in the MHFA training from 35 (52%) at 6 months to 44 (68%) at 12 months. Students reported consistent interests in topics they would like to practice/learn more about in their future curriculum at both the 6 and 12 mark time frames.

Conclusion:

The results indicate MHFA training is beneficial and necessary for pharmacy students. The study helped highlight areas in which the curriculum should continue to focus on such as anxiety, depression, psychosis and the importance of practicing skills for awareness and intervention. Overall, the skills learned in MHFA and improvement of mental health education throughout the curriculum will ultimately optimize patient care, awareness, and the well-being of our student body, faculty and staff.