Promoting good mental health and well-being at Birmingham Medical School

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The Feel Bright campaign was set up in 2010–11 as a joint initiative between student representatives from the MBChB Medicine and Surgery Programme at the Medical School (part of the College of Medical and Dental Sciences at the University of Birmingham) and senior welfare staff to promote good mental health and well-being, reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, and raise awareness that medical students:

- can develop mental health conditions
- can recover from mental health conditions
- can continue with their medical degree, and practise medicine, despite declaring that they have a mental health condition
- will be supported by the medical school.

The MBChB student welfare representative is responsible for coordinating the campaign which has recently been recognised by the Medical Schools Council (MSC) and General Medical Council (GMC) as being a good example for other Medical Schools across the UK (as per the recent MSC/GMC report "Supporting medical students with mental health conditions" (pgs 23-25) – see **http://www.medschools.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/Mental-Health-Guidance.pdf (http://www.medschools.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/Mental-Health-Guidance.pdf)**).

Feel Bright's message is spread in three key ways:

1) Interactive sessions
First-year students take part in an interactive lecture, which focuses on understanding stress, anxiety and depression. The student welfare representative, senior welfare tutors and a local consultant psychiatrist speak about:

- common causes of stress in medical students
- how students can recognise the difference between stress and depression or anxiety
- the prevalence of depression or anxiety in medical students and doctors
- sources of help and treatments available

Throughout the lecture, students are invited to use anonymous audience response clickers to answer questions. Answers to the questions are then discussed to bust common myths, for example 'If I tell the medical school am depressed, they will throw me out', and 'I can't be a good doctor if I have a mental illness'.

Medical student volunteers from years three to five lead an interactive discussion session with small groups of second-year students. The session focuses on promoting good mental health – for example, students are encouraged to ask questions and discuss concerns about starting hospital placements. Each group is asked to come up with the top-ten tips for managing stress and anxiety, and the group with the best tips is awarded a prize. The best tips are then circulated to students in years one and two via email.

2) Website
The Medical School student intranet has a dedicated area for Feel Bright, which gives:

- a brief overview of the campaign
- a wealth of resources about mental health conditions
- mindfulness and resilience coaching resources
- information on how students can access mental health advice and support services both within and outside the medical school.

The website hosts key documents, such as a poignant reflection written by an ex-medical student who developed depression at medical school and is now successfully working as a doctor. The Feel Bright Booklet, which was written by two students, contains condensed user-friendly information about mental health conditions, and tips for managing stress and anxiety, especially at revision time, and clearly describes how to access help and support. Additionally, a student wrote a workbook and developed podcasts to support students in practicing mindfulness-based skills to build resilience and deal with stress. This was initially supported by relaxation sessions that were run in the medical school. The mindfulness resources proved popular and have been adopted by the London Deanery's coaching and mentoring service, as well as other post-graduate bodies within the NHS.

3) Email
The student welfare representative sends regular emails to students in all years of the MBChB course to:

- remind students of the resources available on the Feel Bright website
- inform students about special events taking part on campus – for example, World Mental Health Day sessions run by the wider university.

Professor David Adams, Dean of the Birmingham Medical School said, "Medicine can be a stressful course and the Feel Bright Project provides much needed support for students who get into difficulties. We are so proud of our students who dedicate their own time to supporting their peers through any difficulties they may have".

For further information about Feel Bright, please contact:
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