

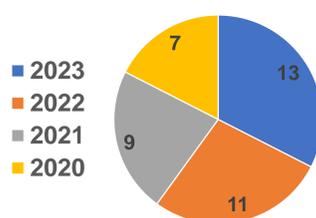
## Background

- Medical students face a disproportionately high level of anxiety, burnout and psychological distress during their educational training.
- Alarming, meta-analyses estimate that nearly 1/3 of medical students globally experience anxiety<sup>1</sup> and 27% experience depressive symptoms<sup>2</sup>.
- As such, medical schools have introduced curricular changes and wellness programs in an effort to foster a healthier learning environment.
- There is very little research exploring how communication practices, an integral aspect in a school medicine, can influence these outcomes.
- Therefore, this project aims to identify specific organizational communication practices that can impact mental wellbeing from a medical student's perspective.

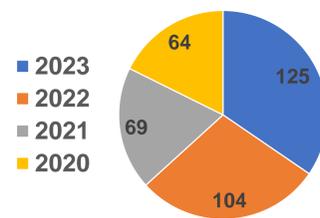
## Methods

- Data collection methods included focus groups, individual interviews, and surveys with open ended responses.
- 41 students participated in either focus groups or individual interviews, comprised of 13 students in the class of 2023, 11 in class of 2022, 9 in class of 2021 and 7 in the class of 2020.
- 364 students participated in the online survey, comprised of 125 students in the class of 2023, 104 in the class of 2022, 69 in the class of 2021 and 64 in the class of 2020.
- This project is a subset of a larger study aimed at mapping organizational communication at Wayne State University School of Medicine (WSUSOM). This study used various approaches to gain a rich perspective from medical students at different levels of training (M1 to M4).
- Thematic analysis and triangulation processes were used to identify common themes in student responses.

**Focus group participants**



**Questionnaire participants**



# How does organizational communication affect medical student wellness at WSUSOM?

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We thank the faculty, administrators and students who generously shared their time to participate in this study.

### References:

- (1) Puthran, R., Zhang, M. W. B., Tam, W. W., & Ho, R. C. (2016). Prevalence of depression amongst medical students: a meta-analysis. *Medical Education*, 50(4), 456-468. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.12962>
- (2) Quek, T. T.-C., Tam, W. W.-S., Tran, B. X., Zhang, M., Zhang, Z., Ho, C. S.-H., & Ho, R. C.-M. (2019). The Global Prevalence of Anxiety Among Medical Students: A Meta-Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(15). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16152735>

## Results

### **Theme 1: Reflecting intent**

Communication between students, administrators/faculty reflect positive intentions of staff in supporting student wellbeing.

*"I haven't met a single person in administration who doesn't like 100% care about students and their well-being and like...I think everyone has the best of intentions, I think we have such a caring faculty at work dedicated to serving us."*

### **Theme 2: Method of communication**

Students identified an overwhelming amount of email-related communication as a source of stress, which may affect student engagement in WSUSOM community.

*"The SOM should look into investing in a NON-EMAIL method of.. Communications... I really think with this students would be less stressed out from emails (a major source of daily anxiety for me), and also more likely to attend/engage in student orgs or optional WSU SOM activities."*

### **Theme 3: Medical culture**

Communication at WSUSOM fails to address harmful notions prevalent in medicine, such as viewing individuals who utilize mental-health resources as inferior.

*"so say a student that needs a specific resource [related to mental health], there's a notion in medicine that it's...you're looked upon as weak..."*

### **Theme 4: Confidentiality**

Students voiced concerns that disclosure of mental illness may negatively impact their academic and career success.

*"If a student comes in with some sort of concern for like a mental health issue, there's always concern that it will be used against them later on for when they pursue their clinicals..."*

### **Theme 5: Timeliness**

Delays in communication disrupt students' abilities to balance academic, financial and familial responsibilities.

*"we're all 20 to 30 year old adults with real world issues, outside of school ...when they make changes last minute ... we just feel like they don't care."*

## Discussion

- Our results suggest that student wellbeing is positively affected when intent is effectively communicated. Communication practices that negatively impact student wellbeing include overwhelming amounts of communication, failure to address negative attitudes in medicine, concerns about confidentiality and timeliness. Students may benefit from concise and timely communication practices that emphasize commitment to student wellbeing and confidentiality.
- Future steps include an in-depth analysis of differences in communication-related stress based on level of training.
- Similar studies can be conducted at any school of medicine with the desire to foster healthier communication practices.