From College Advocates to Peer Support Advocates

Enhancing Peer Support at the UNC School of Medicine (UNC SOM)

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Overview

I. About the Larry Keith Advisory College Program
II. Brief History of the College Advocate Program
   • Stimulus for enhancing peer support at the UNC SOM
III. From Idea to Concrete Plan
IV. New Peer Support Advocate Role
V. Where We Are Now & Next Steps
VI. Challenges & Lessons Learned
Larry Keith Advisory College Program

• Originally established in 2008 as an advising, career, and professional development program

• Students randomly assigned to one of 6 Advisory Colleges (a.k.a. “Harry Potter houses”)
  • Each college has 2 faculty advisors
  • Every year has 2 students that serve as Advisory College Advocates

• Build relationships to provide specialty neutral advice for professional development

• Resource for adjusting and navigating medical school
History of College Advocate Role

• Created to help students with the challenges of medical school
• 2 students elected by their class for a 1-year term
  • Organized social events
  • Participated in orientation
  • Attended 'brown bag' lunches with students and advisors
• In 2014 curriculum changed and the continuity in advocate support was lost
The Need for Enhanced Peer Support

• Peer support was requested for years as students felt isolated in their specific years
• Previously denied due to concern of oversight and burden on students
• COVID highlighted the need to have additional structures of support
• Researching other medical school models provided reassurance of feasibility
From Idea to Concrete Plan: Timeline

April 2020
"Oh, it wasn't just me?"

Summer 2020
Research, brainstorming, stakeholder input

Sept-Oct 2020
Program plan development

Oct-Dec 2020
Recruitment & Training, Cohort #1

March 2021
Working through "growing pains"
Formalizing the Idea

So *can we* actually do something?

- Research: Michigan, Univ. of Miami, UCF, IU, *school that shall not be named*...
- Discussions with leaders of current programs

Proposal to SOM Wellness Program Leadership

- Initiation of formal planning meetings (weekly)
- Needs assessment
- Plan for engaging stakeholders, learning best practices
Pivot Point: Engaging Experts & Stakeholders

Focus Group: College Advisors

Decision-maker buy-in
Planning for Implementation

• **New Core Team Member:** Sara Tinkham, Director of Medical Student Advising Programs

• Clear path forward, integration with **Advisory College Program**
  • Redefine College Advocate role → Peer Support Advocate

• Engagement of MS1 Chief Advocate

• Defining ideal Peer Support Advocate, developing **recruitment process** to **optimize** chances of finding these individuals
  • Added challenge: COVID = MS1s only know one another by “Zoom persona” (often a black box w/ a name)
College Advocate → **Peer Support Advocate**

- **College Advocate**
  - Google Doc sign up “recruitment” process +/- election
  - No formal training

- **Peer Support Advocate**
  - 2 Advocates per College
  - Plan events to promote student well-being
  - Peer or self-nomination → Invitation to apply
  - Peer support training/onboarding
Recruitment

• Utilized a class wide email and GroupMe messaging to reach all students
• Nomination process versus popularity contest
  • Qualtrics survey
    • Name, advisory college
    • Tell us about yourself and your interest in this role
Selection

- Committee
  - Director of Medical Student Advising Program
  - Wellness Consultant
  - MS1 Chief Advocate
  - Students involved in program's conception (MS3s, MS4s)
- Students were evaluated within their Advisory College pool of applicants
Training

• Asynchronous module
  • General overview
  • Basic support techniques
  • School specific challenges / resources

• 1-hour synchronous onboarding session
  • First formalized meeting
  • Review of module and role playing scenarios
Where We Are Now

- Consultation with UNC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
  - Formalizing boundaries and what students can expect
- Supplemental training, delivered by Peers for Progress for Peer2Peer (UNC-wide peer support program)
- Will formally announce program within the next few weeks
Next Steps

- Implementing a request portal
- Looking towards welcoming and supporting the incoming MS1 class
- Generating new promotional material
- Transitioning out of COVID (hopefully)
- Rolling out to other classes
Key Insights & Lesson Learned To-Date

Being a student-led initiative has tremendous advantages...but also comes with challenges

You will hit speedbumps & potholes
- Leaning into each other, remembering our “why”

It takes a village
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Any questions?