



Teaching Academy
Consortium of West Region CVM

Title: Drop-in meditation sessions for student exam-associated stress: what have we learned?

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Abstract:

Faculty of veterinary medical colleges are aware of student stress, especially preceding and during exam periods. Veterinary medical education literature supports faculty observations and impressions of this student experience. During the 2020 and 2021 academic years, COVID-19 impacted the stress and mental health of many, students and faculty alike. At the Western University of Health Sciences, local public health regulations limited the ability of on-campus teaching leading to a largely virtual curriculum. Throughout this period, the faculty anecdotally observed more episodes, with amplified episode severity, of student anxiety, stress, and mental health concerns.

In an effort to supplement and support student wellbeing, students were offered several virtual guided meditation sessions during two exam periods in the spring 2021 semester. Application of mindfulness in veterinary medical students has demonstrated that regular practice of mindfulness can lower stress, anxiety, and depression or offer a protective effect against worsening anxiety or depression. In addition, students with higher mindfulness and self-compassion assessments in one study had higher evidence of resilience.

The goal of these exercises was to improve the wellbeing of our students during the stressful exam period. During the first exam period in the spring 2021 semester student stress and anxiety were anecdotally higher than in the second exam period at the end of the spring 2021 semester. Student interest in virtual drop-in meditation sessions was likewise higher in the first exam period. While we tried to produce a regular exercise, we could not foresee that having the meditation sessions scheduled only during the busy exam weeks may have prevented more students from seeing the benefit of these activities. Future plans include starting the meditation and other mindfulness activities early in the semester and associate them with other academic activities.