

## **EXPLORING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF VETERINARY STUDENTS ENGAGED IN A PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING CURRICULUM**

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Manifestations of graduate student mental health stemming from the exposure to chronic stress, anxiety, or depression (SAD) in health science education are at a historical highpoint. This research was designed to inform scholar practitioners as to the trends associated with SAD development in the field of veterinary medicine, where the largest gap in the literature existed, to better guide their future efforts with empirical evidence. A cross sectional sequential explanatory mixed methods design, including cohort-specific surveys and interviews with recent graduates, was carried out to accomplish this. The statistical analyses performed on quantitative data paired with the results from the qualitative data analyses revealed two new themes when considering mental health in the field of veterinary medicine. In addition to previously reported themes, SAD development is heavily related to transitional factors and individual specific factors associated with personal circumstance that are present throughout the curriculum. Additionally, both data sets revealed that faculty behaviors were valued by students and perceived as decreasing their SAD development throughout the curriculum, highlighting the importance of the role of the educator in facing the present graduate student mental health crisis, but deficits in availability of this resource were identified in later years. Some of these trends are specific to problem-based learning environments, while others are more generalizable to the health sciences. Institutional leadership need to take this evidence and enable it to inform the practice in their specific contexts by incorporating it into existing action around improving student mental health.