



# Position Paper on Provider Mental Wellbeing

## 2019- 2020 IPHSA Health Policy Committee

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## 1. Executive Summary

The University of Toronto Interprofessional Healthcare Students' Association (IPHSA) is a non-profit group of students from all of the 11 healthcare faculties at the University of Toronto, plus the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College and the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine. IPHSA is committed to advocating for interprofessional awareness among disciplines dedicated to health and social services, facilitating collaboration and communication among healthcare students and ensuring equal representation of all healthcare disciplines.

IPHSA's Health Policy Committee, chaired by the Vice Presidents of Health Policy, leads a variety of advocacy initiatives that voice the interests of students from all healthcare faculties. One responsibility of this Committee is to develop position papers using an interdisciplinary approach and recommend a well-researched course of action for the Centre for Interprofessional Education.

This year, through collaborative discussions, the Committee informally identified a lack of teaching on healthcare provider mental wellbeing to be a significant concern. As a result, this initiative aimed to formally evaluate the degree of teaching and support available within each faculty on this topic and create a position paper based on the results.

The authors of this position paper represent a small working group of dedicated students within the Health Policy Committee. This group collaborated with students and faculty from each of the 13 healthcare faculties to extract information on the extent of formal and informal teaching on this topic. The results contributed to the creation of this paper and the development of a recommendation to develop an interprofessional education (IPE) elective. The findings of this paper and the method used in its creation have been presented at the 2020 [Conference on Health Advocacy Toronto](#). The slide deck of this presentation can be found [here](#).

On the whole, the authors would like to highlight that applying an interdisciplinary pedagogical approach to addressing provider mental wellbeing can allow for large-scale improvement in healthcare education. Collaboration between student groups from various healthcare faculties has a significant role to play in driving this change.

Sincerely,



Ushma Purohit  
Vice President of Health Policy  
Co-Chair of Health Policy Committee  
Interprofessional Healthcare Students' Association

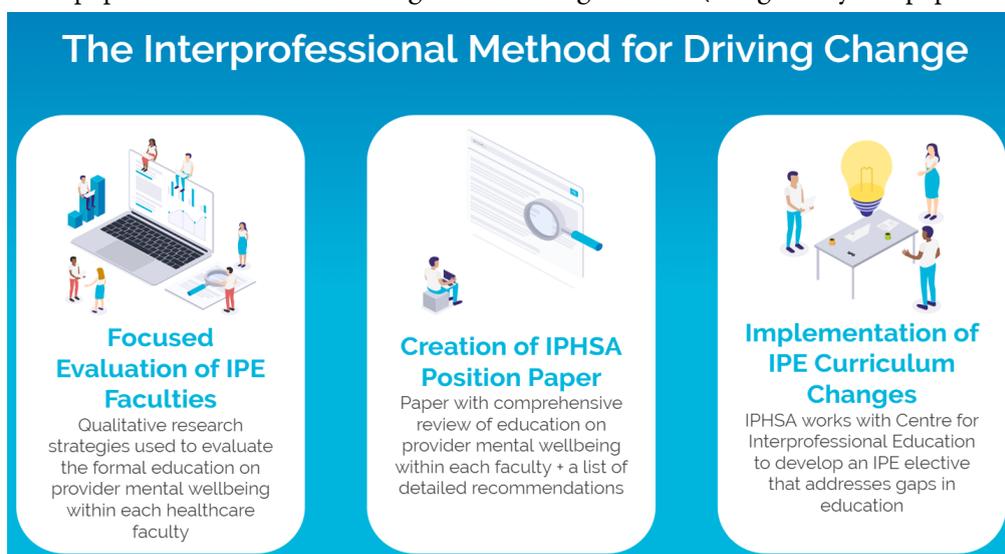
## 2. Research & Writing Process

Students and faculty members from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and various programs within the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto (Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physician Assistant, Social Work and Speech-Language Pathology, Kinesiology, Medical Radiation Sciences) were contacted in one of four ways:

1. A survey was distributed to students and staff through student Facebook groups and email communication. The survey asked questions regarding:
  - a. The degree to which the program has equipped them with the support and knowledge needed to meet their mental health challenges as a healthcare provider (HCP)
  - b. The formal teaching on healthcare provider mental health that is offered by their respective curricula
  - c. The informal student-led initiatives offered to address this topic; and
  - d. Their opinions on the content that should be included in future healthcare provider mental health awareness events.
2. Select students and faculty members through email and personal communication were contacted to solicit further input
3. Members of the IPHSA Health Policy Committee provided personal insight into their current programs
4. Centre of Interprofessional Education student representatives from Physician Assistant, Medicine, Social Work, Naturopathy, Chiropractic, Speech-Language Pathology, and Physiotherapy programs were invited to provide further insight

Due to challenges with outreach during the pandemic, not enough data was obtained from the Masters of Professional Kinesiology program and the Bachelor of Science in Medical Radiation Sciences program in the Faculty of Medicine and thus, these were not included in our research findings.

The position paper was then created using the following method (designed by the paper authors):



### 3. Background

The term burnout is commonly believed to be divided into three main dimensions including emotional exhaustion (tiredness, decreased emotional resources and somatic symptoms), depersonalization (negative attitudes, cynical outlook and impersonal feelings towards patients) and reduced personal accomplishment or efficacy (feelings of incompetence, inefficiency and inadequacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Due to the lack of a clear definition, researchers are faced with difficulty when discussing the causes and possible solutions for provider burnout and mental health.

Burnout within the workplace has been observed to decrease productivity, job satisfaction and reduce commitment to the workplace (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), while also creating a “negative spillover” effect due to the contagious nature of burnout on colleagues (Burke & Greenglass, 2001). In addition, burnout increases chronic stress, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance and fatigue in the personal domain (Kumar, 2016). Burnout has also been shown to impact relationships, addictions, premature retirement and most seriously, suicide (Kumar, 2016).

In the mental health field, burnout impacts 21-76% of employees (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, & Pfahler, 2012). It has been reported that 80% of physicians suffered from moderate to severe emotional exhaustion, 61% suffered from moderate to severe depersonalisation, and 44% suffered from moderate to low feelings of personal accomplishment (Thommasen, Lavanchy, Connelly, Berkowitz & Grzybowski, 2001).

Likewise, stress levels in students have been reported to range from 31% to 73% (Firth, 1986). Multiple studies in the USA reported that over 50% of students, residents and physicians meet the standards for burnout (Ghossoub, Nadler & El-Aswad, 2018; Rothenberger, 2017). Similar results were found in a Canadian study. According to a survey sent to Canadian medical students, about 37% of them experience burnout (Glauser, 2017). The high percentages of burnout rates in healthcare students, residents and physicians demonstrates the urgency for mitigation.

Due to the heterogeneity of individuals and the wide range of symptoms burnout can have on job performance and personal health, it is important to provide a plethora of support for all professions within the healthcare field. There is rationale that demonstrates the strategies currently being used to combat burnout including workshops and continuing education are powerful. Self-care workshops provided to pediatric residents have been found to improve depersonalization, assessed with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Martins et al., 2011). The workshops discussed ways to manage burnout, signs of burnout, identification of risk factors, and the impacts burnout can have on professional activity (Busireddy et al. 2017). Meditation was also found to reduce emotional exhaustion, using the Respiratory One Method on family physician residents (Ospina-Kammerer V & Figley CR, 2003). Another study performed by Ghossoub, Nadler & El-Aswad (2018) investigated the impact of providing students with a two-day workshop focused

on emotional intelligence and self-care techniques. The knowledge gained through workshop participation indicated that burnout education had sustained benefits on both a personal and professional level (Ghossoub et al., 2018). Similarly, Acker (2011) found that employees who have the opportunity to partake in professional development programs including continuing education and in-service training programs are better equipped to handle pressures in the workplace that are often perceived as stressful. These results demonstrated that familiarity to burnout can reduce the negative implications of burnout on healthcare providers.

Healthcare students are the employees of the future and the literature has demonstrated that students' well-being will benefit if provided with resources including burnout education and self-care strategies. By working together to provide students with tools needed to succeed in the workplace, it is possible to create change and propel our healthcare system into a more positive and productive environment.

#### **4. Research Findings**

##### Chiropractor

The Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College (CMCC) partakes in a national public education campaign known as [Mental Illness Awareness Week](#). The campaign was created to focus on the reality of mental illness. Although the event is organized by CMCC, students are asked to share challenges and their own strategies with other students. The CMCC also requires that all staff and faculty are trained in [Mental Health First Aid](#) to recognize signs of mental health problems and guide individuals to professional support if required. The students can also voluntarily register to learn Mental Health First Aid. After surveying students within the program, they felt they were somewhat equipped to meet the mental health challenges they will face as a healthcare provider. In 3rd year, the students are required to enroll in a clinical psychology course. This course provides insights on strategies when dealing with mental health. The students also noted there is an open door policy with Student Services, and these services can connect students to counsellors if needed.

##### Dentistry

The Faculty of Dentistry organizes a lunch and learn one to two times a month with the focus on mental health. Here, students are able to ask questions and learn strategies related to coping. There is also a current survey initiative focusing on improving the needs of second entry professional programs.

Currently, the Faculty of Dentistry does not provide consideration for the awareness of long term healthcare provider mental wellbeing and burnout. Responses provided are based on students who were surveyed.

## Medicine

There are a number of existing mental health resources for students in the Doctor of Medicine Program at the University of Toronto. The Resilience Curriculum is an initiative created by the faculty and the [Office of Health Professions Student Affairs \(OHPSA\)](#) that acknowledges the importance of physical and emotional wellbeing and helps students develop skills to be resilient (Kulman et al., 2019). The curriculum is delivered through a series of lectures and small group discussions throughout pre-clerkship and clerkship. Some of the topics discussed at these sessions include compassion fatigue, imposter syndrome, and self-care strategies. Sessions are led by facilitators at different stages in the medical training and include staff physicians, residents, and senior medical students. The Resilience Curriculum also has a companion online site which includes e-learning modules and information about existing resources for students. Additionally, students have access to confidential one-on-one personal and career counselling services offered by OHPSA. OHPSA also works closely with student groups to develop mental health resources and supports. One initiative that was created through the collaboration between OHPSA and a student group called Student Health Initiatives and Education (SHINE) is the [Wellness Ambassadors Program](#). This peer-support program includes volunteer student ambassadors who can help inform and direct their peers to various resources.

## Naturopathy

The [Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine \(CCNM\)](#) offers counselling services for students within the program. The CCNM also has an initiative called “Thrive.” Thrive was created to invite students, staff and faculty to think and talk about health and wellbeing. This program offers multiple events throughout the year to facilitate the conversation around mental health. Thrive also has partnerships with the library to provide students with access to resources including Bright Light Therapy lamps, MUSE medication headbands, and various books related to health and wellbeing. After surveying students in the program, it was discovered that students had mental health discussions within their courses. The students are required to take a health psychology class each year, and this course allows for practice of interviewing skills, specifically active listening. The students in second year are required to practice these interview skills in triads, assuming and rotating between the roles of a doctor, patient, and observer. This triad allows for knowledge of all perspectives in the clinical setting. In fourth year, the interviewing course shifts to a mental health focus, which is guided by Dr. Jonathan Prousky.

## Occupational Therapy

The Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy (OS and OT) at University of Toronto aims to provide trainees with a holistic education to build essential competencies for practice. The emphasis provided on mental wellbeing of not only patients/clients but also on future healthcare provider mental wellbeing and burnout is evident. The main mode of training on provider mental health is delivered through coursework and fieldwork. Through [coursework](#) in year one of the two-year program, students get the opportunity to obtain a thorough knowledge of mental illnesses, learn about creative treatment plans, hear from

experienced Occupational therapists in various roles providing mental health services, and develop/enhance their interest in mental health.

The Department of OS and OT also enforces particular [fieldwork placement requirements](#) to ensure that students get a variety of learning experience. One of such requirements is that students must complete the following: one “M” Mental Health and one “P” Physical Health OR at least two “B” Combination (Physical & Psychosocial Health) placements. This requirement aims to provide the necessary exposure to mental health care and continue to develop strategies for OT students’ mental wellbeing and prevent burnout. Students are also required to work with various populations, work in a variety of settings, and complete [Interprofessional education \(IPE\)](#) requirements where students will be able to work interprofessionally to obtain/share understanding on mental wellbeing of both their clients and providers. The department also further formed alliances with the [Office of Health Professions Student Affairs \(OHPSA\)](#) to provide OT students evidence-based resilience workshops and personal counselling services. In addition, students are also assigned [faculty advisors](#) at the beginning of year one to provide 1-on-1 support with any student concerns including mental health throughout the program. These are some of the many initiatives implemented by the department to ensure wellbeing of future Occupational Therapists.

### Pharmacy

The faculty of pharmacy supplies a [wellness counsellor](#) dedicated to its students. This service is available multiple days per week (Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday afternoons) and the counselling sessions take place right in the Leslie L. Dan Pharmacy Building. This is widely used by students, especially during exam times. There are also links to a broader U of T psychiatric and wellness service. However, such services are not specific to pharmacy students and the faculty is not doing enough to address pharmacy students’ mental problems. Recent results from a research student at the Faculty of Pharmacy who focuses his work on mental burnout points out that there is not much help or preventive measures against mental burnout in the profession. There is a need for all faculties to put in more energy and effort in preventing “small” problems from spiraling into burnout and more serious mental health issues.

### Physical Therapy

Within the Physical Therapy (PT) program, professors continuously emphasize the importance of work life balance. The program organized a session with a learning strategist, who shared tips on increasing the productivity of studying as well as strategies for dealing with and managing stress. Students in the PT program have access to the [Graduate Wellness Services](#) provided by the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto where they can access resources pertaining to health, wellness and counseling services. Currently, the curriculum within the PT program does not provide consideration for the awareness of long term healthcare provider mental wellbeing and burnout.

### Physician Assistant

Within the Physician Assistant program at the University of Toronto, students gain exposure to provider mental wellbeing largely through lectures embedded throughout their curriculum. Previous lecture topics include burnout, work-life balance, study strategies, and time management. There is also a course in the curriculum where students participate in peer mentor groups. Within these groups, students have opportunities to listen to personal experiences of colleagues regarding burnout and challenges in the workplace. There is also some exposure to the topic of provider burnout at select IPE events, of which participation in IPE events is a requirement of their program. Finally, physician assistant students have access to confidential personal and career counselling services provided by the [Office of Health Professions Student Affairs \(OHPSA\)](#). Overall, formal teaching on provider mental health is limited. As a result, there is an interest for more opportunities to learn from practicing professionals who can share their challenges and how they overcame them.

### Social Work

Social work students can specialize in a mental health stream and there are [multiple courses](#) regarding mental health that they can take (eg. The Context of Mental Health and Health Practice, Social Work Practice in Mental Health). These are very patient focused courses; however, in SWK 4622H there is a lecture that is focused on provider wellness and capacity. Other than that, there is currently no formal training regarding provider burnout or mental wellbeing in the social work curriculum, and that seems to be known as an issue. Students have mentioned that they are interested in having more education regarding patient relationships and death. There are small reminders to take time for self-care while going through the social work program, but it is not discussed past that. It is suggested to students to make use of the mental health resources provided by the University of Toronto should they be needed.

### Speech-Language Pathology

The Department of Speech-Language Pathology at University of Toronto aims to provide a holistic training to help students ensure provider mental wellbeing and prevent burnout. The department enhances knowledge through [coursework](#) such as lectures on Neuropsychology, guest lecturers and highlighting relevance to practice. Students are assigned a [faculty advisor](#) to whom they have the opportunity to talk about mental wellbeing before and after a sensitive lecture, placement or for any other situation. The faculty advisors have special training to provide support to students on an individual basis and also refer them to advanced clinicians depending on the type of support needed. The department also has close connections with The [University of Toronto's Health & Wellness Centre](#) where students have the opportunity to receive counselling and psychological services. These opportunities are provided throughout the year including summer and are flexible in the mode and frequency of reaching and receiving help. These initiatives make it clear that faculty and staff understand the importance of provider mental wellbeing when working with vulnerable populations.

## 5. Recommendation

Interprofessional Education (IPE) at University of Toronto provides opportunities for students in healthcare programs to learn and collaborate with each other in a safe space to build knowledge, skills and experience that are crucial for practicing as part of an interprofessional team upon graduation. Existing IPE activities such as Reader's Theatre, Interprofessional Health, Arts and Humanities Certificate Program, and Global Health Film Fest address provider mental wellbeing mainly through art based modalities. Moreover, these activities mainly involve delivering content through presentations.

The goal of the Interprofessional Healthcare Students Association (IPHSA) Health Policy Committee is to create an activity that focuses on lived experiences of provider mental health, and promote learning through a collaborative learning component. In order to address the gaps in the formal education provided by the IPE faculties on the topic of provider mental health and wellbeing, IPHSA is recommending the creation of a two-part IPE elective that would be available to students from all University of Toronto healthcare faculties.

The purpose of the proposed two-part IPE elective activity is to provide students with an understanding of healthcare provider mental wellbeing. During the first part of the IPE, guest lecturers will do a presentation surrounding their lived experiences of stress/burnout highlighting relevancy to their scope of practice and resources they utilized. This part will help students obtain background knowledge and allow them to become familiar with resources to work through part two of the activity, an interprofessional interactive activity.

In this second part, students will watch a video scenario outlining mental wellbeing of a HCPs being impacted. Students will then have an opportunity to engage in discussion within their small interprofessional groups to identify the mental health concern, potential events leading up to the concern, potential next steps/alternative solutions, potential resources to utilize and come up with a brief plan to ensure mental wellbeing in HCPs in the future based on the particular scenario. This small group activity will allow for individual professions within each small discussion group to identify unique ways to address mental wellbeing individually and how it can be addressed from a systemic point of view. This activity will provide an opportunity for students to hear about lived experiences of future colleagues with mental health concerns and build competency dissecting a scenario addressing provider mental wellbeing.

Learning objectives for this IPE activity:

1. Learn about and gain a better understanding of the factors that affect provider mental health
2. Acknowledge that mental burnout/stress is common amongst students and practicing HCPs
3. Learn about resources and strategies to cope with mental burnout/stress, as students and in the workplace

4. Develop necessary skills to cope with mental burnout/stress and be competent to support one another
5. Discuss ways to foster positive space and team dynamic to allow for easy access to peer and professional support in the workplace

Among the six competency domains outlined by the CIHC National Interprofessional Competency Framework, team functioning will be the main collaborative competency that will be addressed in this IPE activity (The Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative, 2010). Team functioning will be addressed through gaining a better understanding of mental health concerns individuals may experience (mental burnout/stress). Providing students who are in healthcare programs with knowledge on provider mental wellbeing will allow them to understand their peers and future co-workers better, enabling them to work collaboratively, resolve any concerns and function as a team more effectively.

In order to implement this plan for an IPE elective, the IPHSA Health Policy committee plans to submit a Process for Interprofessional Education System (PIPES) form to the Centre for Interprofessional Education. The aim is to have this IPE elective available to students during the 2020-21 school year.

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