



# Symposium on Educational Excellence 2023

## OHSU MD peer support program - curriculum and program creation

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### Abstract

In a national climate of healthcare worker burnout, efforts across disciplines have been made to support those who provide medical care for our population. One such effort found to improve the mental health of physicians has been peer support (1). These programs allow physicians a safe space to debrief challenging patient outcomes and even support during legal proceedings. Most importantly, the support is provided by those who understand their lifestyle most intimately – other physicians.

While this approach has been implemented on the attending and resident levels across many institutions, there are few programs available to medical students in the nation (2). Medical students are in a unique position as trainees. Not only are they experiencing patient deaths and poor outcomes for the first time, but they are doing so within an academic environment that is often foreign and challenging to navigate. As a result, many students feel isolated and unsure of who best to turn to for support. This is a key time to support students as they build their own toolbelts for resilience and to influence a new generation of physicians who will be creating the culture of tomorrow's healthcare system.

In response to this need, a small group of OHSU MD students has partnered with the Department of Surgery to build what is now launching as the school's first medical student peer support program. In coordination with the Surgery Core Clerkship, the OHSU MD Peer Support Program has created a clinical elective to train students in providing peer support services. The first cohort, trained in the fall of 2022, completed an eighteen credit-hour course including didactic lectures on communication skills, psychological first aid, mindfulness, OHSU and community resources, and crisis management. The course relies heavily on group discussions, role-play peer support scenarios, and reflective writing. These skills will allow students to be formal leaders in the peer support program but also help them in their future careers as they inevitably guide colleagues and patients through challenging times.

These newly trained peer mentors will be starting their pilot program available to the Surgery Core Clerkship students beginning January 30th, 2023. This will be followed by an expansion to all core clerkships in spring of 2023 and the full MD student body by summer of 2023. Within the program, there will be an on-call service of trained medical students available to debrief any challenging scenarios a clinical-phase student may be facing. Students can reach out via a survey link to request support. Peer support leadership will then respond within 24 hours to set up a time for them to meet one-on-one with a peer supporter. Students will be able to meet with supporter either virtually or in person and be able to not only talk about their experiences, but also be guided to appropriate resources they may benefit from.

The next clinical elective will be available to students at the end of summer 2023 as the next class takes over program leadership.

## Learning Objectives

1. Scope of physician and medical student burnout
2. Data supporting peer support
3. Prevalence of current peer mentorship programs across the country
4. Evidence for how to train peer supporters
5. Description of novel OHSU MD peer support program and future directions

## References:

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