

Student-led approaches to mental wellbeing advocacy

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Abstract

Mental health issues amongst university students are rife. An increase in mental health literacy and an emphasis on wellbeing revealed the importance of having a plethora of resources available to students surrounding mental health support. The Welfare Hub is a student-led project created at the University of Nottingham Medical School to destigmatise mental health discussion, enhance mental health education, and share experiences of healthcare professionals regarding their mental health and university support.

The Welfare Hub was created in 2020 and has developed since then, delivering content primarily through an Instagram account (@welfarehub.nottsmmed) (**Appendix 1**). This year, we decided to undertake a research project into the effectiveness and the impact of the Welfare Hub on its followers and its committee. Following this, discussion around improvements the Welfare Hub can make regarding its content and how to best support future students was incorporated. The hope is that the Welfare Hub can become an example of good practice regarding student-led welfare, not just for medical students, but for all students.

Why was the Welfare Hub created?

It is a well-known fact that university students have high rates of mental health issues and distress.¹ Medical students experience elevated levels of mental health including anxiety, burnout, depression and suicidal ideation compared to students from other courses but are less likely to seek help for these issues due to mental health stigma.² These factors contribute to worsening academic attainment, reduced competency and increased rate of errors in clinical practice, and also leaving medical school altogether.³ Contributions towards stress on

student's mental health include the learning environment, workload, problems with patient interactions, financial concerns and worries regarding future career progression.³

High-achieving students may also self-impose high attainment goals that can lead to the development of imposter syndrome.² Imposter syndrome – defined as “chronic feelings of self-doubt, the fear of being discovered as an intellectual fraud, a perception of being less intelligent or competent than peers, and an inability to internalise a sense of competence of skill in high-achieving individuals” by Clance and Imes in 1978 – has a prevalence of around 30 per cent amongst medical students and can be a risk factor for later burnout and psychological unrest.^{4,5}

What did this project investigate?

In December 2022, a survey in the form of an Instagram poll was distributed on the Welfare Hub Instagram account on three different occasions throughout the month. The survey aimed to garner student opinion on their perception of the Welfare Hub. Data was collected and inputted in a spreadsheet.

Each committee member was asked to complete a reflection of how they found the Welfare Hub, why they wanted to be a part of it, the remit of their role, the impact of their posts, and anything they would like to do in the future. An inductive thematic analysis was undertaken on these responses.⁶ This data was transcribed by one individual and codes were generated based on common phrases and sentiments that appeared in each committee member's reflections. Similar codes were then grouped together in order to inform and develop themes.

As of 23 January 2023, the Welfare Hub had 468 followers. In the period of 26 October 2022 to 23 January 2023, there was a net gain of eight followers. The majority (47.1%) of followers are in Nottingham. The gender distribution of followers was 75.1% women and 24.8% men.

What did the research show?

This project identified that the Welfare Hub's Instagram account was closely associated with mental health awareness and education, and that the best performing posts were those that offered positive connotations of support relevant to medical students and those that detailed lived medical student's experiences and advice. For example, the highest performing posts were 'good luck' posts before the commencement of examinations (**Table 1**).

The Instagram poll was available for both followers and non-followers to answer. The responses and results of each question are in **Table 2**. The first question asked if respondents found the Welfare Hub useful. After the application of a Likert scale (where 'yes' is 1 and 'no' is 3), the mean for this question was 1.4. Once it was determined whether respondents found the Welfare Hub useful, they were asked how satisfied they were with the Welfare Hub. 'Completely satisfied' was given the value of 1 and 'somewhat dissatisfied' was given the value of 3, leading to a mean of 1.5. Finally, respondents were asked what they would like the Welfare Hub to do in the future. There were no responses to this question.

Committee members for the 2022/2023 academic year were asked to detail how they found the Welfare Hub, why they wanted to be involved, what they have achieved and future plans. Of 10 committee members, eight responded. The first theme identified was 'interest in mental health and sharing experiences,' where many committee members outlined that they discovered the Welfare Hub through recommendations on social media. They cited that they became involved due to an interest in mental health, destigmatising mental health, and personal experiences of themselves and family members with mental health. The second theme 'developing communication skills within the committee,' was highlighted when committee members detailed the posts they had created and skills they had developed as part of the committee, such as designing and researching posts, and communication skill development. The third theme found was 'the importance of supporting, destigmatising and educating medical students about mental health,' where committee members focussed on the importance of the Welfare Hub in providing mental health awareness and education. The final theme identified was 'developing the Welfare Hub in the future.' When asked what they would like to do as part of the Welfare Hub in the future, a popular comment was to put on more events for students, as well as collaborating with other societies. Examples of quotations aligned with each theme can be found in **Table 3**.

Where do we go from here?

The Welfare Hub reached many more non-followers than it did followers, however, it was followers that were more likely to engage with the content. This reemphasises the importance of using the Instagram 'like' metric rather than accounts reached. Going forward, it seems as though it would be beneficial for the Welfare Hub to carry on with its current strategy concerning Instagram posts: a mixture of educational content with motivational and experience-sharing posts surrounding medical school. These posts align with the values of the Welfare Hub concerning mental health awareness and education, whilst staying relevant to medical students at the University of Nottingham, where the majority of the follower base seems to be located. Instagram is 'hedonic' in nature – users want to see and share things that elicit a positive reaction.⁶ An uplifting message of 'good luck' before an exam or an anxiety-reducing post about looking for housing is likely to have a positive impact on users who view these posts, and therefore they are more likely to engage with it. As far as posts go, it would be beneficial to have more input from staff

members and other societies into Instagram posts to encapsulate the environment of students at the University of Nottingham Medical School.

Overall, the Welfare Hub has made great strides in creating educational and supportive posts for medical students, underpinning the key project values of reducing mental health stigma among medical students and professionals. This research project illuminated the best performing Instagram posts and which posts to keep making going forward, underpinned by follower opinions in the form of an Instagram poll. These findings highlighted the importance of mental health support and education for medical students and its significance in the current time period, where we need to greater support our students to avoid the development of poor mental health. The Welfare Hub was, and will continue to be, a project made by students, for students, and will always keep the best interests of students at heart.

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Type of Post	Posts	Likes	Accounts Reached	Average Likes	Average Reach
Support and Good Luck Posts	5	188	1624	37.6	324.8
Q&A/Advice Posts	4	95	1858	23.8	464.5
Introductory Posts	12	264	3519	22.0	293.3
Meet Your Med School	3	49	1573	16.3	524.3
Awareness Days	7	82	1307	11.7	186.7
A-Z of Mental Health	12	108	1976	9.0	164.7
Charity Chats	5	40	686	8.0	137.2
Total	48	826	12,543	17.2	261.3

Table 1. Analytic data from Welfare Hub Instagram posts from September to December 2022. Data is arranged to show the number of likes and accounts reached for each type of Instagram post the Welfare Hub makes, as well as the numbers of each post.

Question	Number of Responses	Results	Percentage of Responses
Do you find the Welfare Hub useful?	18	Yes	66.7%
		Sometimes	22.2%
		No	11.1%
What do you find the Welfare Hub most helpful with?	14	Mental Health Awareness	42.9%
		Mental Health Support	14.3%
		Information about Medical School	35.7%
		Information About Charities/Wellbeing Accounts	7.1%
What is your favourite series?	12	Meet Your Med School	16.7%
		Let's Talk About Med School	58.3%
		A-Z of Mental Health	12.5%
		Mental Health Spotlight	12.5%
Do you use our website?	13	Yes	7.7%
		No	92.3%
How satisfied are you with the Welfare Hub?	13	Completely Satisfied	53.8%
		Somewhat Satisfied	38.5%
		Somewhat Dissatisfied	7.7%
		Completely Dissatisfied	0.0%
How did you hear about the Welfare Hub?	10	Through a Committee Member	20.0%
		In a Welcome/Welfare Lecture	0.0%
		Through Medsoc	30.0%
		Other	50.0%
What would you like to see the Welfare Hub do in the future?	0	Open answer question.	

Table 2. Instagram poll questions and results distributed in an Instagram story to followers of the Welfare Hub's Instagram account in December 2022.

Thematic Analysis of Committee Member Reflections		
Theme	Percentage of Total Codes (n=106)	Example Responses
Interest in Mental Health and Sharing Experiences	21.7%	"I have always been a big advocate for destigmatising mental health problems after seeing many close friends and family members struggle with their mental health"
Developing Skills within the Committee	19.8%	"I am responsible for developing content such as the A-Z of Mental Health series for our website and Instagram"
The Importance of Supporting, Destigmatising and Educating Medical Students About Mental Health	46.2%	"I hope that we have been able and will continue to raise awareness that people are not alone in their mental health struggle"
Developing the Welfare Hub in the Future	12.3%	"In the future, I hope we can host events and collaborate with different societies to have more people in the conversation surrounding mental health"

Table 3. Results of inductive thematic analysis of Welfare Hub 2022/2023 committee reflections. Committee members were asked to detail their experience of the Welfare Hub, how they found it, why they became involved, what they do in their role and what they would like to do in the future. Each theme is shown as a percentage of total codes. Example responses for each theme is detailed for further information.

Appendix 1. An example of a typical post from the Welfare Hub.



The Welfare Hub was created in 2020 with the aims of increasing mental health literacy amongst medical students and supporting them during their time at medical school. The 2022-2023 committee came together to research the impact of the Welfare Hub and how to develop it going forward. This research was then presented at the University of Nottingham Teaching and Learning Conference 2023.