



RICHARD L. PAGE, M.D.
DEAN

Dear Larner Community,

On the occasion of the publication of a paper published today online in *Academic Medicine*—an article as important as it is courageous – by one of our own, Christopher Veal, from the Class of 2021, I am writing to affirm the commitment of our College to each of you in promoting an environment of unwavering support for mental health.

Depression and suicide have long been recognized to afflict, in a disproportionate way, physicians, trainees and medical students. The reasons are many, including the stress of caring for very sick patients, lack of sleep, long hours without breaks, as well as what can sometimes seem to be impossible expectations for success. For students, these stresses are compounded by academic pressures that can translate to opportunities for residency training, or even graduation. Far too often individuals do not feel comfortable sharing their feelings, or reaching out for help, for fear of judgment or negative professional repercussion. As such, those who need help the most may internalize thoughts and perceptions of their own failure while, at the same time, finding it unacceptable to perceive failure, or even to ask for help.

Not everyone who comes to medicine has experienced the same degree of privilege prior to arrival, and students from underrepresented groups may be subject to even greater stress and require enhanced (and therefore equitable) academic and psychological support. Our culture must normalize students' requests and need for academic and psychological support. Furthermore, we can offer the entire LCOM community (faculty, staff and students) training to recognize signs of crisis and tools to provide support in a manner free of judgement.

Our College has many services already in place, and in the last two years we have expanded our counseling opportunities and availability. Our leadership in the Office of Medical Student Education, Medical Student Services, and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have further advanced efforts in recent months, in the setting of the pandemic, the national reckoning with social injustice and in response to unique needs of our campus. Nevertheless, we can do more. As such, I am taking this opportunity to embark on next steps in our ongoing commitment to fostering an environment of wellness worthy of the Larner Community.

On behalf of our Larner College of Medicine I affirm:

- Our community shall embrace the fact that we are all vulnerable and must give a priority to self-care and wellness.
- We shall work to eliminate any stigma associated with mental illness or the need for psychological assistance.
- We aspire to provide equitable academic and personal support for each student.
- We shall offer tools for members of our community to help recognize and assist in the setting of psychological crisis, including the risk for suicide.
- We shall assure that each student is provided information regarding the confidential mental health services that are available.

The tenets above are consistent with our Statement on Professionalism, in which we emphasize *cultural humility, kindness and respect*, along with *compassion and accountability*. We owe ourselves and our colleagues the same commitments that we offer the patients we serve. In fact, we cannot fully benefit our patients without first attending to our own wellness.

While this discussion has focused on the high-risk population of medical students, trainees and physicians, nobody is immune from stress, particularly in this difficult time. Each member of our community is strongly encouraged to ask for help and utilize both on and off-campus resources to receive the support they need.

In order to promote the culture and infrastructure required to accomplish the goals listed above, I am tasking our Office of Medical Student Education, our Wellness Committee, and our Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to develop a working group with the charge to assess our current services and identify ways to optimize our effectiveness.

Further, LCOM will work with the UVM Medical Center Graduate Medical Education office, the UVM Medical Group, UVM Medical Center leadership, and our Staff Council to collaborate and align our priorities regarding wellness, resilience, mental illness, burnout and suicide prevention. In addition, we will fortify our efforts at suicide prevention with the launching of an educational campaign as well as the enhancement of specific mechanisms for safe and confidential assistance.

As part of the LCOM effort to provide equitable support for all, we will continue our work with the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, along with the Dean's Advisory Committee for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, to help ensure that our support services reach members of our underrepresented community. As part of this effort, we will enhance our ongoing priority of increasing diversity among our faculty, staff and students.

As we continue this journey together, please watch this very short [video](#) that provides common-sense tools to recognize and intervene in the case of potential suicide.

As always, if you, or someone you know, are in need of professional counseling please do not hesitate to contact UVM's Counseling and Psychiatry Services at (802) 656-3340 (for students) or Invest EAP at (802) 864-EAPØ (3270) or toll free at 1-866-660-9533 (for staff and faculty assistance). There is also a National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

In closing, I want to thank Chris Veal for his call to action, and for his partnership as we further address these critically important issues. The article can be downloaded as a PDF [here](#).

Sincerely,



Richard L. Page, M.D.
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