FAQs:
Mental & Physical Health Care During Medical School

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Am I allowed to practice medicine if I have been treated for a mental health diagnosis or substance use disorder?

Yes. In one study, 27% of medical students have had depressive symptoms and 10-12% of physicians have a substance use disorder. With treatment, countless physicians have had long, productive, and satisfying careers.

Am I required to report my mental and physical health diagnoses when applying for my medical license?

Physicians with mental and physical health diagnoses can obtain a medical license in every state, but the process for doing so varies between states. States differ in how they ask about current versus historical diagnoses. How this information is handled also differs from state to state as listed on the application. Concerns about getting a medical license should never keep you from seeking treatment for a mental or physical health diagnosis.

The New Mexico license application asks: “Do you have or have you been diagnosed with an illness or condition which impairs your judgment or affects your ongoing ability to practice medicine in a competent ethical and professional manner?”

I am in crisis and need help NOW. Where can I get help?

There are many confidential resources available to support you. Use of these resources will not be reported to the medical school or your training program:

- **Psychiatric Emergency Services**. Open 24 hours/day, 7 day/week. Call 505.272.9038.
- **Agora Crisis Center** – Hotline staffed by trained specialists – 505.277.3013. If you go to website, you can also find information for a chat hotline.
- **National Suicide Awareness Hotline** – 24/7 free and confidential support – 800.273.8255 and crisis text line (text home to 741741).
- **New Mexico Crisis and Access Line** (NMCAL)– 24/7 free and confidential support – 855.662.7474.
- **UNM Student Health and Counseling** – SHAC - has a 24-hour crisis line available to anybody in the UNM community, not just students. Dial 505.277.3136 and select option 3. There is a licensed counselor available 24/7.
What should I do if I am sick and cannot work on a day I am supposed to see patients? Will it affect my grade?

If you cannot work due to being acutely sick and are scheduled to see patients, notify your block chair or your supervising attending and resident immediately so they know you are okay and not to expect you that day. Students may have concerns this will affect their grade, but it will not if you follow the School of Medicine policy. Attendance policies are available in the Student Handbook.

How can I take time off to see my doctor for routine care?

If you need to see your doctor for routine care, try to schedule this when you are not expected to be in didactics or taking care of patients. If the only times available are when you are expected in clinic or in the hospital, notify your block chair, resident, attending, and clerkship director so they can determine if make-up time is necessary. More information about taking time off is available in the Student Handbook.

If I have to take sick leave during medical school, is the reason why kept private from my colleagues and supervising physicians?

Yes. If you have to take a prolonged amount of sick leave that will affect your ability to complete educational requirements on time, you should talk with your medical school advisor early to plan on how to minimize the effect on your education and clerkships.

I used to have a substance use disorder/drinking problem/drug problem. Do I need to tell the medical school?

You’re not required to tell the medical school or your residency program about previous diagnoses, but you may wish to speak with your advisor or program director so that they can connect you with resources to help you find extra support to manage the stresses of medical school and residency.

Do I need to report use of medical marijuana or other controlled substances to my medical school?

There is not yet a consensus in the medical community about how to manage students prescribed controlled substances, including medical marijuana, and some employers (including training programs) require negative results on drug testing at the time of hire and randomly throughout employment. Speak with your advisor about how to manage this, and with your prescribing clinician about other evidence-based treatments that may be available to you. More information on UNM School of Medicine policies is available here: https://som.unm.edu/education/md/omsa/index.html
How should I explain a leave of absence on my residency program application?

Talk with your medical school advisor about what should be said and what does not need to be said. Always plan to be honest in your answers, but know that you aren’t obligated to provide extensive details. For example, it may be enough to provide information such as “I was on a medical leave of absence for __ months and returned to work with no restrictions.” Work with your advisor about how to prepare to answer questions about this on the application and in your interviews.

What should I report on my job applications if I took time off from medical school?

There is not necessarily a requirement to disclose any time off, but it is common to be asked about gaps in training and employment. Always plan to be honest in your answers, but know that you aren’t obligated to provide extensive details including specific diagnoses. For example, it may be enough to provide information such as “I was on a medical leave of absence for __ months and returned to work with no restrictions.” You may wish to speak with your residency program director or another trusted faculty member about how best to answer this in person and on your applications when it comes up.

What mental health questions are asked on residency program applications?

There are no specific mental or physical health questions asked on ERAS residency or fellowship applications. The questions that may apply to mental or physical health diagnoses include:

- Was your medical education/training extended or interrupted? If yes, please provide details [blank box].
- Are you able to carry out the responsibilities of a resident or a fellow in the specialties and at the specific training programs to which you are applying, including the functional requirements, cognitive requirements, interpersonal and communication requirements with or without reasonable accommodations? If no, please list your limiting aspect(s): [blank box]

I am feeling depressed/anxious/stressed and I want to talk with someone.

My work is starting to negatively affect my home life and my relationships with my family and friends are deteriorating.

What resources are available to me?

There are many confidential UNM resources to support you and your mental health. Use of these resources will not be reported to your medical school or your future residency program and no documentation is made in the hospital’s electronic medical record.
• Jeff Dunn, MD is a psychiatrist who is available to see trainees. He can be contacted for therapy and/or medication management. He can be reached at JeDunn@salud.unm.edu and usually responds within 24 hours.

• Rebecca Ezechukwu, PhD, is a UNM psychologist available to see medical students. She can be reached at REzechukwu@salud.unm.edu or at 505-274-8919

• Raven Cuellar, PhD, is a UNM psychologist available to see medical students. She can be reached at 505-239-9880 or ravencuellar@salud.unm.edu

• The Women’s Resource Center, a UNM main campus resource, now has a resource center on the North campus called the Vassar House. The Vassar House provides counseling, group workshops, advocacy and more.

• 1:1 brief, confidential wellness checks with UNM psychologists - no documentation in Power Chart, free. Clinic coordinator Dalia Thompson at (505) 272-6130. These are not considered therapy appointments, but a chance to check in with a psychologist to talk for 1 or 2 brief sessions. If after these initial sessions, you would like more time with the psychologist, that can be arranged – but at this point, your insurance is billed and these future appointments are considered therapy sessions.

I am concerned about my drinking or drug use. What resources are available to help me?

There are many confidential resources available to you at UNM to support you if you’re concerned about substance use. In addition to the resources named above (all of whom can help with substance use), please also note:

• Agora Crisis Center is a phone hotline with walk-in counseling: http://www.agoracares.org/ or 505-277-3013 or 866-HELP-1-NM.

• Pamela Arenella, MD is a UNM Psychiatrist with additional board certification in Addiction Medicine, and is available to meet with residents, fellows and students: parenella@salud.unm.edu.

Is it normal to have thoughts of killing myself sometimes?

No. About 1 in 9 medical students will have thoughts of killing themselves during medical school. Even though thoughts of suicide may be common, they should always be taken seriously as a sign that you might be depressed, burnt out, or under too much stress. If you or a friend are having suicidal thoughts, please contact:

• Psychiatric Emergency Services. Open 24 hours/day, 7 day/week. Call 505.272.9038.

• Agora Crisis Center – Hotline staffed by trained specialists – 505.277.3013. If you go to website, you can also find information for a chat hotline.

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I’ve witnessed or experienced harassment/bullying/abuse/mistreatment by a faculty member. What should I do?

Safety during training and at work is of utmost important. If you are unsure whether a behavior rises to the level of mistreatment, please consider contacting a trusted advisor or the Learning Environment Office:

- Diana Martínez, MPH, LEO Director: deemb@salud.unm.edu or 505.272.7861
- Emma Pettit, MA, EPettit@salud.unm.edu or 505.272.7861
- Felisha Rohan-Minjares, MD, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Medical Education: frohan-minjares@salud.unm.edu or 505.272.8429
- Joanna R. Fair, MD, PhD, DIO, Associate Dean of Graduate Medical Education: jfair@salud.unm.edu or 505.272.6225.
- Complete the online reporting form. When you use the online reporting tool, you have the option of remaining anonymous.