

PRESENTATION 5

A Systematic Review of Physical Activity and its Effect on Burnout and/or Quality of Life in Medical Students

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Background

Medical students are at high risk of burnout and reduced quality of life (QoL). The prevalence of these increases throughout medical school and raises the risk of dropping out. It is important to investigate strategies which could be used to reduce the incidence of burnout and increase QoL, thus mitigating their negative effects. Physical activity has been shown to reduce burnout and increase QoL in different populations. This systematic review aimed to examine whether physical activity/exercise changes the likelihood of burnout and/or influences QoL in medical students.

Methods

Articles were identified through the databases Embase, Medline, PsycINFO, Scopus and Web of Science. Studies were included if both physical activity/exercise and burnout or QoL were measured. A comparison between the two was required. Only studies with medical students were included. A narrative synthesis was conducted due to heterogeneity in the dataset.

Results

Fifteen studies were included, comprising 10,500 medical students. Of these, eight measured burnout, six measured QoL and one measured both burnout and QoL. Physical activity was negatively associated with burnout with a weak-moderate effect size. There was also a positive relationship between physical activity and QoL scores. Furthermore, the findings were suggestive of a dose-response effect of physical activity on both burnout and QoL; higher intensities and frequencies precipitated greater improvements in outcomes.

Key messages

This review demonstrates that physical activity has an important role in reducing burnout and enhancing QoL. These findings have significant implications for practices aiming to promote wellbeing in medical education.

