

A Pilot Study Assessing Resource Insecurity for Medical Students During the COVID-19

Pandemic

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Introduction

- The LHOME initiative was designed to help students in emergent situations – like this pandemic – but has expanded to support students year-round in matters of emergency shelter, resources, and mental health.
- Following an internal assessment of the medical student body in the setting of the emerging COVID-19 crisis, forcing medical intuitions to transition to virtual learning the results from this survey helped to guide internal avenues of support for students (resource-hub) to focus on their academics and professional responsibilities: Meet all academic and professional expectations, Exceed on national examinations, and Limit medical student attrition.

Methods

Survey

- On May 25, a college-wide survey was delivered to examine (a) student living conditions and (b) knowledge of UVM LCOM emergency resources as it relates to Disadvantaged status, Living arrangement (alone, roommate(s), etc), Level of experience with resource insecurity (e.g. clothing, food, and shelter), Level of academic compromise relating to resource insecurity.

Results



Figure 1. Student Class Demographic. 300 respondents out of 480 total students – 63% survey response rate.

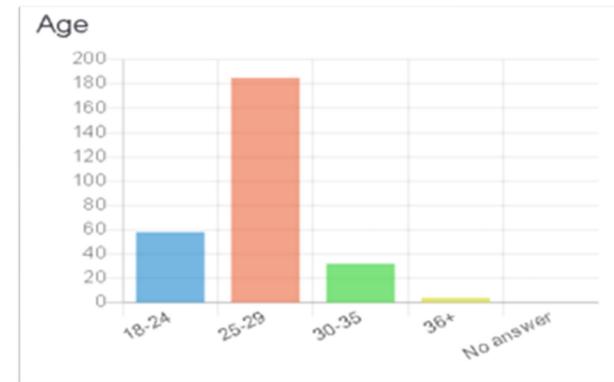


Figure 2. Respondent age distribution. 61% of respondents were between the ages of 25-29 years old. 15% of respondents were aged between 18-24 years. 11% of respondents were aged greater than 30 years.

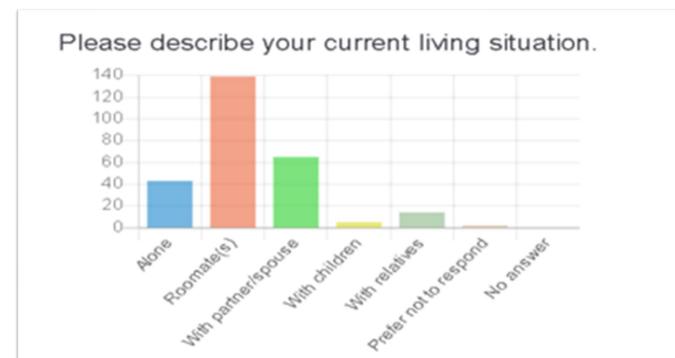


Figure 3. Student Living arrangements. 69% of students reported shared housing (roommate, partner/spouse, children, and relatives). 14% of students reported independent living.

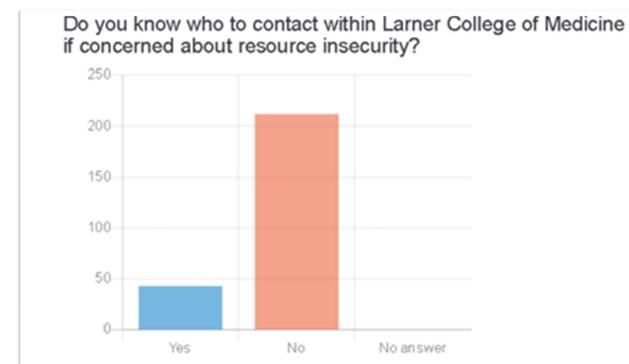


Figure 4. Knowledge of institutional contacts. 73% of the 300 respondents demonstrated unfamiliarity with local and institutional resources available to address resource insecurity.

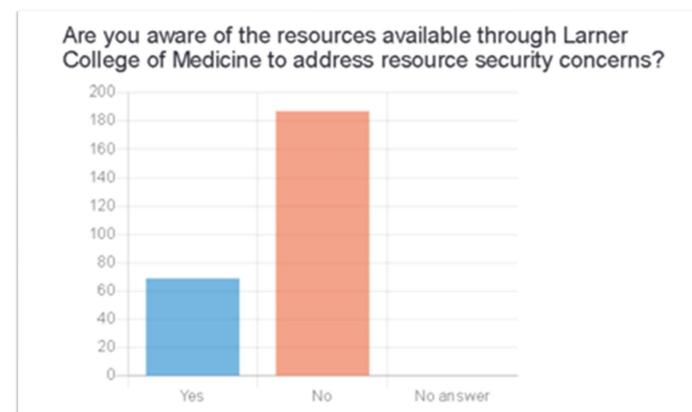


Figure 5. Knowledge of institutional resources. 84% of respondents indicated a lack of awareness about whom to contact for concerns on resource insecurity.

Student Responses

The forcing to stay home has increased the cost of living much more with electricity and heating/air condition and food prices having gone up so it has made it much more difficult financially now that we can't work at school
~Class of 2023

Even though I was aware of the resources available, I did not qualify or was not given the assistance I needed during the transition time to the University of Vermont.
~Class of 2023

I am extremely fortunate to have had relatively little experience with resource insecurity. This is a wonderful privilege I have had but many of my classmates and future medical students cannot say the same. Please allow me to assure you that there is a need and LHOME, etc. should continue as well as be expanded.
~Class of 2023

Figure 6. Student feedback.

Outcome

Robert Larner College of Medicine

- LCOM Office of Student Financial Aid: CAREs Act grant restoration
- Newly-minted services: Free mtgs with a CFP® via WellConnect
- Increased financial wellness initiatives, establishment of Student Advisory Council to Med SFS.

University of Vermont

UVM Office of Student and Community Relations (Food Insecurity Group)

- Food insecurity awareness campaign (social media and physical flyers)
- Created list of resources designed to address student hardship specific to medical students.

Hunger Free Vermont

- Hosted virtual discussion about Vermont's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and newly revised policies to assist medical students experiencing food insecurity.

Significance

The consequences of financial, food, and housing insecurity disproportionately impact non-traditional and underrepresented students. Students can struggle to maintain their grades and balance curricular commitments, suffer mental health crises, and, in some cases, leave school entirely. As such, LHOME was established with the intention of connecting students with resources that will meet their basic needs. The insights gained from this pilot study invite future exploration into the implications of resource insecurity within the medical student community and effective institutional mitigation strategies to support graduate-level learners.

Acknowledgements

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