

Mental illness stigma – peeling the label

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BACKGROUND: Stigmatization is a social reaction of identification (by stereotypes) and discrimination on the basis of characteristics and situations that are associated with an individual. Both, developed countries and developing countries have high appearance of stigmatisation of individuals suffering from mental illnesses. Thus, people with mental illnesses are very often disabled from achieving their basic human rights.

AIM: Previous studies have so far, paradoxically, shown that medical staff has been extremely stigmatising towards patients with mental illnesses. With this research we would like to determine the intensity of stigmatisation among medical students and the possibility of the impact of Psychiatry course on decreasing the mental illness stigma.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This research was conducted among 4th year medical students (School of Medicine, University of Rijeka, Croatia) at the beginning and at the end of Psychiatry course. Standardized and validated questionnaire has been used to determine the elements of stigmatisation towards individuals suffering from schizophrenia, depression and PTSD.

RESULTS: We'll present detailed results of our research on the Congress, while our preliminary results demonstrate a decrease in stigmatisation among participants of the research after a month of intensive interactive Psychiatry course.

CONCLUSION: Interactive and contemporary education as a vital part of Psychiatry course could contribute to reducing mental illness stigma among future physicians. Nevertheless, it is necessary to do a follow-up studies to determine whether the level of stigma is reducing or increasing over time and, anyhow, to develop and implement anti-stigma activities as a part of lifelong education of health care professionals.

Keywords: psychiatry, stigma, mental illness, medical students, human rights

[HTTP://DX.DOI.ORG/10.17486/GYR.3.2201](http://dx.doi.org/10.17486/GYR.3.2201)





Symposia