

Application of a One-Year, Longitudinal Coaching Program to Improve Well-being During General Surgery Internship

Purpose: Burnout among general surgery interns is associated with adverse educational, personal, and clinical outcomes. Utilizing mindfulness and self-compassion skills has been shown to protect against burnout and improve well-being. We created a one-year, longitudinal coaching program for surgical interns and evaluated the impact on intern well-being.

Objective: Our objective was to help interns set and achieve professional goals while promoting well-being skills and practices. We hypothesized that participants would have lower burnout and improved well-being scores.

Methods: A coaching program was incorporated into the curriculum for a class of 32 general surgery interns. Prior to the start of residency, interns completed pre-intervention self-assessments which included the Values in Action Character Strengths Survey, Dweck's Growth Mindset Scale, Grit Scale, Self-Compassion Scale, Well-Being Index, a single-item burnout question, and open reflections. Interns participated in an in-person, 4-hour workshop to learn about and reflect on wellbeing skills before crafting Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs). ILPs consisted of short-term goals, plans of action, reflection on support systems, and anticipated challenges. Faculty coaches used a standardized coaching model with quarterly meetings and an emphasis on positive psychology elements. At the end of the year, interns engaged in a gratitude exercise, developed commitment-to-act statements for the next year, and completed post-intervention self-assessments. A paired t-test compared pre- and post-intervention survey instrument scores.

Results: Interns had a significant improvement in Well-Being Index scores from pre-coaching (2.10 ± 1.18) to post-coaching (3.37 ± 1.64) ($p=0.001$). Interns also experienced a significant increase in burnout upon completion of their intern year ($p=0.001$). There were no significant differences in the remaining measured skills. When comparing pre-coaching and post-coaching means, respectively, Dweck's Mindset Intelligence Scores were 4.04 vs 4.24 ($p=0.93$), Dweck's Mindset Talent Scores were 3.93 vs 4.11 ($p=0.38$), Self-Compassion Scores were 3.30 vs 3.39 ($p=0.82$), and Grit Scores were 3.87 vs 3.74 ($p=0.26$).

Conclusion: Longitudinal coaching for general surgery interns can improve their well-being, though may not fully ameliorate burnout. Further study will examine the impact of coaching on in-training exam scores, preliminary intern or fellowship match success, and qualitative analysis of written reflections.