

## COVID-19 SPECIAL COLLECTION

### PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

# Wellbeing during COVID-19: A social media takeover

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#### Abstract

**Introduction:** Student wellbeing is a key component of pharmacy programmes, with most events occurring in-person through co-curricular or extra-curricular activities. With the shift to online classes due to COVID-19, many wellness events were cancelled due to social distancing limitations. However, promotion of wellbeing was considered to be of utmost importance during this time due to rising levels of stress and social isolation among students. **Description:** The school's Instagram and Facebook accounts were managed by a group of the university's faculty for six weeks. Each week, different daily wellness themes were shared and participation by followers encouraged through quizzes, polls, or reposts. The Instagram stories and posting platforms were used routinely with select posts also shared via Facebook. A new hashtag was created and promoted to encourage additional posting and community building. Video stories were also shared of faculty expressing their mental/physical health challenges and subsequent coping mechanisms during COVID-19. **Results:** During the last six weeks of virtual learning, 280 stories and 23 posts were shared via Instagram. Shared stories included promotion of: cardiovascular exercise, weight training, yoga, music, media, gratitude, recognition, positive thinking, coping and games. Overall, 20 different faculty and staff were involved in sharing video stories to promote wellbeing. Of the 13 posts also shared to Facebook, a total of 10,429 people were reached. **Conclusion:** School social media platforms can be used to regularly connect virtually during times of crises. Promoting wellness activities can help engage students and faculty/staff to ensure they are focusing on their own wellbeing. With social distance regulations for the foreseeable future, pharmacy programs should consider using social media as a wellbeing tool for both student and faculty/staff engagement

#### Introduction

Health, wellbeing, and resilience have been a focus in pharmacy education over the past five years. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP) has pursued several initiatives to target the wellbeing of pharmacists and pharmacy students over the past few years that have proven to be effective in promoting these standards of health (ACAP, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the importance of health and wellbeing on a global level (Boyd, 2020; FIP, 2020). In light

of this, the International Pharmaceutical Federation released a statement that called for support for pharmacists working on the front lines during this time. They argue that pharmacists are often the first point of contact many patients have within the healthcare system and should, therefore, have access to any and all support systems they deem necessary (FIP, 2020).

While pharmacists fight for support on the frontlines, pharmacy students have also had to adapt to these uncertain times. Quarantine, isolation, and social

distancing have disrupted routines and brought awareness to potentially unmet physiological, psychological, and safety needs of students (Schlesselman, Cain, & DiVall, 2020). With mental health issues and instances of domestic violence and rising across the country, pharmacy students need the support from faculty, staff and peers now more than ever.

Changes in the way faculty, staff, and students interact necessitates innovation to current wellbeing strategies. Routine encouragement to focus on mental health and wellbeing will no longer suffice (Brazeau, Frenzel, & Prescott, 2020). Within the confines of quarantine, students can no longer go to the gym for exercise, socialise with friends, or speak in-person with their advisors. Bringing mindfulness and wellbeing to a digital platform became essential overnight. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the faculty and staff at Wingate University School of Pharmacy resorted to otherwise unconventional methods to promote wellbeing in the lives of students. Social media platforms were used to promote healthy activities and garner engagement from students. Here we detail an approach to engage students and promote mental and physical wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Description of Innovation**

Knowing the risk social isolation posed to our students, a Wellness Initiative was developed. Three faculty members spearheaded the effort, but participation from all faculty and staff was encouraged. The rapidly evolving nature of COVID-19 dictated use of already established social media platforms. The school’s Instagram and Facebook accounts, managed by a staff member and student intern, were established in the autumn of 2017 and July 2011, respectively.

In the Spring of 2020, following campus closure due to COVID-19, a group of faculty members assumed the management of the account with a purpose of increasing wellness-related content and connecting students, faculty, staff, and alumni socially for the remaining six weeks of the semester; Compatible content was also shared via the school’s Facebook account. A new hashtag was created and promoted to encourage additional posting and community building. Instagram stories were utilised with a new theme shared every day with different modalities for engaging followers (Table 1).

In addition to social engagement, the platform was also used to recognise mental health effects of isolation and encourage followers to seek support. Faculty and staff shared videos from their homes, expressing vulnerability

and personal struggles. Promotion and links were provided for university mental health services and followers were encouraged to reach out to support services. Participation was tracked through quizzes, polls and reposts. All content was discussed and approved by the coordinating faculty members prior to posting.

**Table 1: Social media themes**

<b>Monday</b>		<b>Meme Monday</b> Share a COVID-19 related meme (pictured)	<b>Music Monday</b> Share your current quarantine music favourites	<b>Mindful Monday</b> Join faculty-led a mindfulness how-to guide
<b>Tuesday</b>		<b>Talk to your person Tuesday</b> Reconnect with someone you have not spoken with recently (pictured)	<b>Trivia Tuesday</b> Answer general trivia questions	<b>Taco Tuesday</b> Make and share photos of your favourite tacos
<b>Wednesday</b>		<b>What are you watching Wednesday</b> Share what television shows you are watching (pictured)	<b>Win for the week Wednesday</b> Share some good news from your day	<b>What are you thankful for this Wednesday</b> Share something you are thankful for today
<b>Thursday</b>		<b>Throwback Thursday</b> Identify faculty and staff from their childhood photos (pictured)	<b>Take time for yourself Thursday</b> Take a short break for yourself today	<b>Travel Thursday</b> Share favourite previous trips and future travel destinations
<b>Friday</b>		<b>Fitness Friday</b> Join a faculty or staff-led exercise session (pictured)	<b>Friday Firsts</b> Name something that was a first for you during isolation	<b>Finals week Friday</b> Share strategies to decompress and refocus on studying

**Evaluation**

During the six weeks of virtual learning, 280 stories were shared on the social media platforms, averaging nine stories per day. In totality, 20 different faculty and staff shared video stories to promote wellbeing. Additionally, 23 individual posts were made to Instagram and 13 posts

shared to Facebook. The 13 posts shared to Facebook reached a total of 10,429 people.

Specifically, the school Instagram account use also increased, connecting students to faculty and staff since the creation of the spring wellbeing initiative. Prior to spring 2020, the account had 39 posts and four stories. Following the wellbeing initiative, the account had an additional 27 posts and 26 stories through summer 2020. Lastly, there are now 45 hashtag posts from various Instagram accounts highlighting wellness activities.

Anecdotal feedback from students was largely positive via participation in stories, as most were interactive in nature, and likes of posts. Stories that garnered the most interaction were those that included quizzes or polls. Stories that involved freeform answers received the least amount of participation. Faculty and staff who participated in sharing wellness videos also enjoyed the experience as it provided, not only a connection to the students, but a wellness outlet for themselves as well.

### Future Plans

Social media is well known as an efficient and effective tool in business marketing, given more than 40% of the world's population enrolled in at least one platform (Khoros, 2020). It is easily accessible from mobile devices and offers instantaneous content delivery and receipt. Additionally, more than 75% of Millennial and Generation X populations have both been noted to be active users of social media (eMarketer, 2018). Since these two populations make up a large portion of pharmacy school students currently, using social media can be a beneficial resource to promote and disseminate information. For the initiative detailed above, social media served as a useful tool to distribute information and gather student feedback pertaining to wellbeing during the last third of the semester following campus closure. While the school had historically maintained a presence on Instagram and Facebook, it was only in the time of isolation that its potential was capitalised.

Gathering student feedback from the intervention would have been prudent, but given the nature of the quick shutdown and desire to create a platform immediately, the feedback received was anecdotal in nature. While this was a limitation in our initiative, the increase in the content shared and interactions via student responses or views was significant compared to the limited content shared prior to our initiative. Overall, the more content shared, the more students and faculty and staff that can be reached.

Suggestions for implementing or enhancing current social media platforms for schools and universities include adequate resources, data-gathering capabilities and stakeholder buy-in. An estimated ten hours per week was split amongst three faculty members and a student volunteer to keep content up to date. While it was feasible over the course of our initiative, for long term sustainability, having a dedicated employee familiar with the technology is imperative. Likewise, the type of account set-up will dictate the amount of data that is retrievable following any interventions. For example, in Instagram, business accounts compile more data than personal accounts such as shares and likes. Finally, social media initiatives are only effective for students if students are following the accounts. Marketing, encouraging followers, providing pertinent and timely content, and following social media etiquette are also important.

Despite the urgency of this initiative, it was so successful, the school invested in it long term. A Wellness Task Force was established with the charge 'to cultivate an environment of wellbeing amongst students, faculty and staff and recognise wellness as a priority for professional and personal development.' Additionally, a student was hired as a part-time social media assistant. By interacting more with students, the school hopes to better the social health of students in order to provide a more stable and healthier lifestyle during these times of social distancing and beyond.

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