

#233 Ryan Doherty, Clinton Akalonu, Nathalie Cadacio and Samra Qadeer

Advisor(s): Vikram Pagpatan

### **Occupational Therapy Program Development for SUNY Downstate's Student-Run Free Clinic**

**Objective:** The present study aims to gather data regarding the experiences and mental health needs and perceptions of healthcare workers and students affiliated with SUNY Downstate's University Hospital of Brooklyn (UHB) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using this data, we hope to highlight a need for the inclusion of occupational therapy services as SUNY Downstate's student-run free clinic (SRFC).

**Methods:** Researchers developed a cross-sectional quantitative survey to evaluate the mental health needs and perceptions of healthcare workers and students in healthcare professions working at UHB during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were surveyed about symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and burnout, the impact of COVID-19 on personal relationships, and the potential roles and mental health interventions of occupational therapy services at the SRFC in mental health services for UHB employees and students.

**Results:** A total of 348 healthcare workers and students were surveyed. Respondents reported fears of spreading COVID-19 to loved ones, emotional impacts related to a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), and perceptions of stigma in receiving mental health services at their workplace. The most popular mental health occupational therapy intervention identified was the creation of individualized coping strategies and mental health-focused daily routines.

**Conclusion:** There is a clear need for mental health services for hospital employees and students that served during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is also a significant stigma attached to receiving general mental health services. This endeavor supports the role of occupational therapy services in the context of a SRFC amid a pandemic with an increased rate of needs for mental health services among UHB employees and SUNY Downstate students.

Additional contributors to this project:

Dr. Beth Elenko, PhD, OT/L