

## The Attitudes of Romanian Medical Students Towards Mental Illness

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**Introduction:** Stigma and discrimination are associated with psychiatric disorders throughout the world. Several surveys have shown that the general population has limited knowledge about mental illness and holds unfavorable attitudes toward people with mental disorders and that physicians and medical students endorse this stereotypical views and negative attitudes.

**Objectives:** The objective of this study was to determine the attitudes of medical students towards mental illness by comparing those who have had contact with mental patients and those who have not and to evaluate the impact of an educational intervention designed to reduce stigma.

**Methods:** A case vignette and two dependent measures (social distance and dangerousness scale) were used to assess the attitude of medical students toward mental illness. An educational program was developed to change attitudes towards mental illness and was conducted on 140 medical students from University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Iuliu Hatieganu", Cluj-Napoca, Romania (70 from first year and 70 from sixth year) using a pre- and post-questionnaire study design. A similar study without the educational program was conducted on 140 medical students as controls.

**Results:** The final year students who had knowledge and contact with patients were less stigmatizing toward mentally ill patients. After the programs statistically significant change in attitude toward mental illness were observed. No significant change was observed in the control group.

**Conclusions:** The education of medical students and their attitudes toward people with mental illness play a crucial role and may represent a further step in creating clinical practices with an antistigma orientation.