



Development of an Elective on Eating Disorders for 4th Year Medical Students at VCU – an Interprofessional Collaboration with Equip Health and the Richmond Center for Eating Disorders



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Introduction

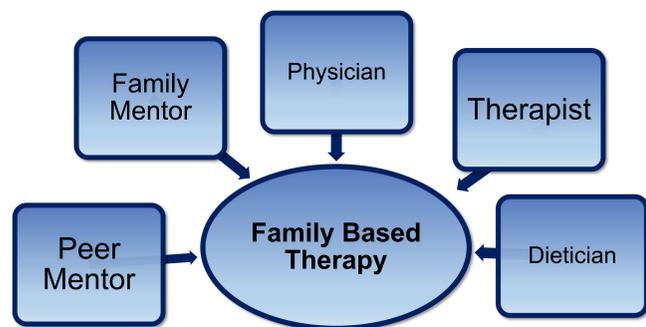
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of eating disorders have doubled.²
- Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses with the 2nd highest mortality rates of all mental illness (only second to opioid addiction).³
- Physicians represent an important point of contact for eating disorder identification and treatment, yet studies have found significant knowledge gaps in the treatment and identification of eating disorders,¹
- Bridging this gap requires innovative solutions, creativity, and vision-oriented leadership.
- Medical education on eating disorders is often sparse or superficial, reaffirming stereotypes about patients with eating disorders.
- Students at VCU School of Medicine are currently developing an elective course on eating disorders focused specifically for medical providers.



Richmond Center
for Eating Disorders

EQUIP

Fig 1. Partners include therapists, dietitians and physicians at Richmond Center for Eating Disorders (RCED) and Equip Health



The Richmond Center for Eating Disorders (RCED) is a local clinic in Virginia that provides FBT.
<https://richmondcenterforeatingdisorders.com/>

Equip Health is a completely virtual practice that offers FBT.
<https://equip.health/aboutus/>

Fig 2. Family Based Therapy (FBT) – currently the most effective treatment modality for eating disorders.

Objective

Outline the work-in progress development of a 4th year elective on eating disorders, with a focus on the analysis and design phase.

Methods

Step 1: ASSESSMENT & ANALYSIS

- Involved conducting a literature review on the eating disorder landscape, eating disorder education in medicine, and physician knowledge and confidence in treatment of eating disorders. Key takeaways included:
 - Patients with eating disorders often present first to their family/primary care physicians with physical manifestations of disease.
 - However, many medical providers feel ill-prepared in identifying and treating eating disorders. Biases and stereotypes often hinder care. Overall, more education is desired.
 - Yet, there is sparse education on eating disorders in medical school and residency training.
 - Few medical schools or residency programs offer formal learning opportunities about eating disorders, revealing a gap in medical education.

Step 2: DECISION & DESIGN

- Involved determining course objectives based on gaps in eating disorder education for medical providers. Objectives outlined below:
 - 1. Gain exposure to the Richmond Center for Eating Disorders in Virginia and the out-patient eating disorder clinical setting
 - 2. Be able to name the **key diagnostic criteria** of most common eating disorders, while appreciating the overlap between conditions
 - 3. **Dispel common myths** surrounding eating disorders, and be able to identify eating disorders in non-stereotypical patients
 - 4. Be able to **identify key warning signs** of eating disorders and disordered eating behaviors in patients
 - 5. Learn **how to communicate** concerns about eating disorders with patients
 - 6. Appreciate how **biopsychosocial factors** influence eating disorders treatment and plan
 - 7. Recognize the importance of **eating disorder treatment** to reduce mortality and learn how to refer patients and offer resources
- Decided on an educational framework that involves 2-weeks of integrated virtual didactics with in-person clinical experience.

Step 3: DEVELOPMENT

- Currently developing the specific course syllabi, schedule, PowerPoints, and clinical experience in collaboration with Equip and RCED.

Discussion

- Patients with eating disorders often present first to their family physicians with physical symptoms. Failure to recognize warning signs of eating disorders can hinder delivery of care.
- Making changes in medical education can help address this significant gap in care.
- To our knowledge, there are few, if not any, medical schools that offer a focused elective on eating disorders.
- This process could inspire other medical students across the nation to adapt and develop a similar educational model at their medical schools.

Future Directions

- Development:** Continue to develop didactic course material in collaboration with Equip Health and clinical experience material with RCED.
- Implementation:** Present course at VCU curriculum council meeting to gain approval. Implement course in elective catalog.
- Evaluation:** Determine metrics to evaluate effectiveness of course.



Fig 3. Educational framework for elective.

Acknowledgements & Disclosures

We would like to thank the founders at the Richmond Center for Eating Disorders for their willingness to work with VCU Health, and the physicians at Equip Health for the mentorship on this project. We have no disclosures.

References

¹Anderson, K., Accurso, E.C., Kinasz, K.R. et al. Residents' and Fellows' Knowledge and Attitudes About Eating Disorders at an Academic Medical Center. *Acad Psychiatry* 41, 381–384 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-016-0578-z>

²Asch DA, Buresh J, Allison KC, et al. Trends in US Patients Receiving Care for Eating Disorders and Other Common Behavioral Health Conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(11):e2134913. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.34913

³Chesney E, Goodwin GM, Fazel S.(2014). [Risks of all-cause and suicide mortality in mental disorders](#). *World Psychiatry*, 13(2).