

Training of Healthcare Professionals in Dealing with the Stigma of Mental Illness

Formação de Profissionais de Saúde para Lidar com o Estigma das Doenças Mentais

Keywords: Attitude of Health Personnel; Mental Disorders; Portugal; Psychiatry; Social Stigma

Palavras-chave: Atitude do Pessoal de Saúde; Estigma Social; Perturbações Mentais; Portugal; Psiquiatria

To the Editor:

We have read with interest your article Vilar *et al* "Decrease in Stigma Towards Mental Illness in Portuguese Medical Students After a Psychiatry Course", which stated that medical students showed a decrease in stigma towards people with mental illnesses after attending a psychiatry course.¹

It is essential to know about stigma, which is considered a factor that influences and may cause people with mental health problems to abandon the treatment they receive due to lack of empathy and understanding of the situation they are going through.² In addition, several studies have shown that many healthcare professionals have a pessimistic perception of the current situation and recovery of people with mental illness, which leads to negative attitudes towards the care of these people.³ The presence of stigmatizing attitudes may cause people with mental illness to reduce their interest in seeking treatment, which will have a negative

impact on their mental health.⁴

The lack of knowledge and the negative attitude of healthcare professionals towards people with mental illness can lead to stigma against them. Therefore, it is essential that health sciences schools develop courses and training on this topic and also promote internships in healthcare institutions, so that healthcare professionals can become aware and learn in depth about the experiences of these people. This could help break stereotypes, reduce or eliminate stigma and consequently provide quality care.⁵

Finally, it is important to carry out more studies on the attitudes of healthcare professionals in terms of stigma towards people with mental illness. This could boost the implementation not only of more courses and training programs but also of an undergraduate level curriculum covering topics that define the importance and care of mental health.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed equally to the concept, draft, review and edition of the work.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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