

Wellness Wednesdays Series Holds First Diversity of Wellness Forum

The University of Miami Miller School of Medicine's Wellness Advisory Council, led by co-chairs Rikera Taylor (MS4) and Christine Nunez (MS3), hosted its first Diversity of Wellness Forum as part of its virtual Wellness Wednesdays series.



After-class glow.

The diversity forum, hosted by Wellness Advisory Council Interpersonal Domain co-chairs Christina Barkas (MS2) and Natalie Hickerson (MS2), gave members of the Miller School's diverse student organizations an opportunity to describe what wellness means to members of their group.

Student leaders at the September 16 event included members from the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, Asian American Medical Student Association, Jewish Medical Student Association, Student National Medical Association,

Latino Medical Student Association, UMed Abilities Coalition, and UM Muslim Association. The forum was also attended by faculty advisors from the Wellness Advisory Council, including Hilit F. Mechaber, M.D., senior associate dean for student affairs, and Cristina Garcia, assistant director of career services.

Meeting wellness needs

Students were encouraged to engage in an open dialogue about how wellness needs can be met for students from various backgrounds.

Zachary Cromar (MS1) shared his experience. “As a student who recently moved from Utah, I have had limited experiences with diverse groups, but in recent months I have learned new information that I otherwise would not have known.” While referring to the difficulties that he has experienced when meeting other students, Cromar stated, “I also understand that there are certain stereotypes associated with being a student from Utah, but I am aware that many students may have limited information about people from my state.”



Learning to make Persian chicken

kabobs.

Some students shared ideas for increasing cultural awareness and celebrating diversity in safe spaces with other students, including spoken word and poetry events hosted by student organizations. Others discussed the importance of cultural competency training, sharing their desire to create informational pamphlets explaining the beliefs, cultures, and traditions of students and patients from various backgrounds.

Student leaders agreed that now is the perfect time to engage in meaningful conversations about medical student wellness.

“It’s time to re-define what it means to be a medical student,” said Donovan Dowers (MS2).

They added that the challenges, hardships, and sacrifices faced by medical students aren’t always acknowledged or understood.

“It is important for everyone to understand the fatigue that several Black students have experienced,” said Carey Green (MS2), referring to the difficulty that students of color have faced in recent months, when events highlighting racial injustice have made national headlines.

Leaders from the Wellness Advisory Council encouraged student leaders to host upcoming Wellness Wednesdays events that invite all members of the student body to come together virtually for discussions and workshops dedicated to medical student wellness.



Learning to juggle.

Wellness Wednesdays held during the summer months included a virtual pet therapy session, hosted by Miller School peer support navigators Alexandria Poitier and Billy Scola, with assistance from Yvonne Rodriguez, a licensed clinician from the Miller School's Counseling Center. Students and faculty introduced their pets and discussed the difficulties associated with being in medical school during the COVID-19 pandemic, including feelings of burnout, depression, and anxiety.

The Wellness Advisory Council, working with the Miller School's various student organizations and the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement, will continue to hold Wellness Wednesdays during the coming weeks. The council also recently introduced a bi-weekly newsletter to highlight upcoming wellness events and resources for Miller School students.

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