

**EXPLORING COMMUNITY MEMBER EXPERIENCES WITH MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN ORDER TO IMPROVE MEDICAL EDUCATION.**

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By reducing pre-clerkship education to one year, the University of Colorado School of Medicine (CU SOM) has reduced already limited pre-clinical coursework in psychiatry and mental health care. The importance of caregivers and family members in the experience of mental illness is not a specific learning objective in pre-clinical education. The objective of this community-based participatory research study is to identify issues facing patients with mental health problems in the Denver Metro area that could be mitigated through changes in medical school education. This study will 1) describe the attitude and beliefs of the mental health care received and the impact of the current mental health system on patient and family wellbeing, 2) determine the gaps and barriers faced by community members attempting to receive care 3) identify potential opportunities for improving mental health medical school curriculum. In the initial phase of this project, we collaborated with Mental Health Colorado and reviewed 70 online public testimonies from the Colorado Behavioral Health Task Force. Qualitative thematic analysis and Natural Language Processing were used to analyze and interpret the results. The results identified barriers of the mental health system and helped develop 50-60 innovative solutions, which support a service-learning curriculum that could potentially mitigate these issues. Next steps include conducting 50-75 one-on-one virtual interviews and 5-10 focus groups amongst mental health community members (I.e., patients, caregivers, family members, etc.) through the database of National Alliance of Mental Illness CO, conducting a survey of CU SOM medical students and residents in primary care and psychiatry to assess the amount of mental health-specific instruction received during their medical training, and developing a pilot service-learning course.