THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG FIRST YEAR PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of stress on the relationships of first year physician assistant students. Many studies have already been done to examine the amount of stress present in graduate students studying medicine, law, and clinical psychology. While the information obtained by these studies has been beneficial to the groups they addressed, both the physician assistant program and the impact that stress has on the personal relationships of physician assistant students have been neglected. The purpose of this study was to determine each student’s perceived stress level and how it correlated to their personal relationship satisfaction at the beginning of the program and how it changed over time in the didactic year.

Methods: A correlation/exploratory study design was implemented to determine the relationship between perceived stress and relationship satisfaction of first-year physician assistant students. Subjects were recruited from a list of first-year students provided by Master of Physician Assistant Studies Program. A total of 48 subjects, both male and female, participated in the study. The subjects were asked to complete a twenty-one question survey on three separate occasions assessing demographics, perceived stress, and relationship satisfaction, during the first year of PA school. The Perceived Stress Scale and the Perceived Relationship Quality Component Inventory were used consisting of 16 Likert-type items. A Spearman Correlation Coefficient, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, and an ANOVA were used to evaluate the impact of stress on relationship satisfaction among first year physician assistant students.

Results: After evaluating each survey individually, the most comprehensive question from each survey was chosen and compared to that of the other survey. Using a maximum n of 48, a Spearman Correlation Coefficient test was performed to establish a correlation between these two questions at each time. The r values found are as follows: time 1= -0.10647 p=0.5496, time 2= 0.02189 p=0.8948, time 3= -0.16370, p=0.3401. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient was calculated at each time to determine a level of significance of correlation at each time. The r values found are as follows: time 1= -0.32030 p=0.0607, time 2=0.04978 p=0.7635, time 3= -0.19815 p= 0.2467. An ANOVA test was performed to evaluate a correlation between the two surveys over time. The F value for the perceived stress scale was equal to 1.15 with p=0.3203, and the F value for the Perceived Relationship Quality Component Inventory was equal to 0.13 with p=0.8824.

Discussion: It is important to note that stress, whether accompanied by depression or anxiety disorders or not, can have a serious impact on personal relationships. Physician assistant students should not be overlooked when it comes to the presence of stress in
their daily lives and the impact that it has on their personal relationships. The first year of any physician assistant program can be very intense and time consuming, leaving little time for the student’s personal life. This time deficiency places a lot of strain on the student. Students are likely to have a different perception of stress and cope differently. It was predicted that the students will have increasing levels of stress as the didactic year progresses, and that the increasing stress will negatively impact their perceived relationship satisfaction score. A trend suggesting an inverse relationship between perceived stress and relationship satisfaction at times one and three was found. The results of the Pearson test indicated that for subjects who were in a relationship that there was again evidence of an inverse relationship between perceived stress and relationship satisfaction.