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Mental Health Concerns Not a Focus in Preparing High School Students for College Despite Increased Risks

WebMD Collaboration with JED Seeks to Narrow the Gap

NNEW YORK, NY, January 25, 2018 – Most parents do not focus on preparing their children for the mental health issues they may face when transitioning to college or other post-secondary school, according to a new survey from WebMD/Medscape and The Jed Foundation (JED), “Preparing for College: The Mental Health Gap.” Yet, nearly half of all parents/guardians surveyed reported that their child had at some point been diagnosed with a mental health issue, and the vast majority of health care professionals surveyed reported increases in anxiety, stress, and mood disorders among their patients in the same age group.

The WebMD/JED survey includes 712 parents/guardians of high school students, who are planning to attend college or other post-secondary school, and of first-year college students. The Medscape/JED survey of 519 health care professionals includes 202 pediatricians and 201 psychologists/psychiatrists.

The survey is part of an educational collaboration with JED. The program provides parents with resources about how their children prepare – emotionally – for the transition out of high school to college and adult life.

The information and resources are available at JED’s program, Set to Go: settogo.org

And at webmd.com/college-readiness

To read about the survey, click here: <https://www.webmd.com/special-reports/prep-teens-college/20180125/parents-teens-survey>

The overwhelming majority of pediatricians surveyed (93%) said they've seen an increase in teens with anxiety/stress; 88% have seen an increase in anxiety disorders and 75% in mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder over the past five years. Also, nearly half (45%) of parents/guardians responding reported that their child had at some point been diagnosed with a mental health issue, learning disorder, or substance use issues, and 51% of all parents reported their child had seen or was seeing a therapist.

However, nearly half of all parents responding (42%) did not discuss the potential for either anxiety or depression when helping their teens prepare for college or other post-secondary education, and the majority indicated mental health services on campus were not a priority when choosing a school. Only 17% of all parents responding and only 28% of those with children diagnosed with mood/anxiety/stress disorders considered or are considering it a factor in selecting a school.

For pediatricians, however, mental health and emotional wellness are on their radar. The majority of pediatricians responding to the survey report either screening for or discussing mental health issues with patients in late high school or the first year of college. However, only about 1 in 3 pediatricians feel very prepared to address these issues.

“The findings of our survey with WebMD show that many families have been dealing with mental health concerns of their teens, and yet that reality isn’t reflected in the typical college preparation process,” said John MacPhee, JED Executive Director/CEO. “Through JED’s Set to Go program and our collaboration with WebMD, we are changing this dynamic by educating families about the importance of emotional readiness and considering factors related to emotional well-being when selecting a college, and helping parents more holistically support their teens as they prepare for this exciting and often overwhelming life transition.”

The survey findings also revealed that most parents responding were not aware that health privacy laws prohibit access to their child’s health and academic records after age 18 unless their son or daughter grants them permission. Not surprisingly, only 25% of all parents responding (and 29% who have a child with a diagnosed disorder) discussed granting access to medical records.

“The transition to college can be exhilarating, but also very challenging for many students,” said Hansa Bhargava, MD,

senior medical director, WebMD. “The survey shows that there are many areas of opportunity to support parents, guardians and teens in recognizing the potential risks, and ensuring that they have access to the support and services they may need to navigate through any turbulence. Additionally, we need to ensure that pediatricians – the specialty on the front lines of treating this age group – are given the information and resources they need to continue to support patients and their parents or guardians.”

Consumer Survey Methods

WebMD surveyed 712 U.S. resident, self-reported parents or guardians of children in grades 9-12 (or equivalent) who plan to attend post-secondary school, and parents or guardians of children already in their first year of post-secondary school. Respondents were randomly recruited via intercept to take a survey, with no topic identified, on WebMD.com in general as well as from the mental health, parenting, ADHD, substance use and addiction, and stress management/balance topical sections of WebMD.com. The intercept did not describe the topic of the survey, which was conducted from October 2nd to November 30th, 2017. Standard quality control measures included checking for clear question wording, proper question ordering, and use of appropriate scales and response categories. In addition, during the field period, the survey was checked to make certain that respondents were answering all questions logically and that skip pattern programming was working properly. Final data were inspected to ensure data quality. Eleven percent (n=712) of 6,590 qualified respondents completed the survey. Given the limited prevalence for this target population, we report the results without weighting or inferential statistics.

Professional Survey Methods

WebMD surveyed a random sample of 620 US Medscape members, including 519 physicians practicing in pediatrics, adolescent medicine, family medicine, gynecology/women’s health or psychiatry, and 101 psychologists. The survey was administered from October 2nd to November 19th, 2017. Respondents were invited to participate in an online study of “The Clinician’s Role – High School through College.” Physicians in residency and HCPs practicing in academic, research, military or government settings were excluded from the survey. Medscape members who completed the survey were entered into a sweepstakes that awarded 25 random winners a \$100 Amazon gift card. Standard quality control measures included checking for clear question wording, proper question ordering, and use of appropriate scales and response categories. In addition, during the field period, the survey was checked to make certain that respondents were answering all questions logically and that skip pattern programming was working properly. This topic crosses professional disciplines, therefore, results are reported without weighting or inferential statistics.

About JED

JED is a nonprofit that exists to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults. JED equips teens and young adults with the skills and knowledge to help themselves and each other; partners with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention programs and systems; and encourages community awareness, understanding and action for young adult mental health. Learn more at jedfoundation.org.

Check out our programs including: JED Campus (jedcampus.org), Set to Go (settogo.org), ULifeline (ulifeline.org), Half of Us (halfofus.com) and Love is Louder (loveislouder.com).

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About WebMD

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