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Promoting mental health of college students: the "Caring Universities" international endeavour

Most of the mental disorders have their peak onset during college years. Young students face many challenges that may exacerbate current psychopathology or trigger the first onset of mental disorders. These disorders have profound negative effects on student's interpersonal relationships, academic functioning, physical health and labor perspectives. It is time for universities to play a role in improving college student wellbeing. The WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student (WHO WMH-ICS) initiative is aimed at developing and implementing a system for improving resilience and mental well-being in college students. This is a multicomponent international initiative, which consists of epidemiological, effectiveness, and implementation research. The first part this initiative is an online survey assessing college students' mental health. All students in participating universities are invited to fill in this survey to assess wellbeing, mental health problems, and risk factors. This part of the initiative aims to build a large knowledge base for understanding mental health among students. The second part of this initiative is a series of internet-based interventions for mental health disorders, which aims at the promotion and prevention of mental health problems among students. Participating universities develop and test Internet-based interventions in randomized trials. The first pilot tests on such interventions, aimed at depression, anxiety and stress are currently being conducted. The third part of this initiative is the dissemination of evidence-based Internet interventions at universities. When interventions have been proven to be effective in the randomized trials they can be implemented at the university(-ies) and offered to students who are identified through the survey as in need for help. This initiative is now ongoing in several countries worldwide (e.g., Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States), while more countries are expected to join this effort in the near future.