BEHIND THE PRE-MEDICAL MIND



JULY 2026 | VOLUME 1

Pre-Med Vitals

PATIENT INTAKE

Patient INFOMATION:

Patient: Premedical Student

Age: Old enough to know better

Date: Three weeks before finals

Chief Complaint: “I’m fine.”

VITAL SIGNS:

GPA: 3.69
Practice MCAT Score: 467
Volunteer Hours: 269
Research Hours: 186
Hours of Sleep: 4
Resting Heart Rate: 112 bpm
Unread Emails: 67
Missed Family Calls: 6

PATIENT HISTORY:

- Patient reports difficulty sleeping before examinations.
- Patient frequently compares symptoms with classmates.
- Patient believes one B may permanently damage the future.
- Patient skipped dinner Tuesday to finish a laboratory report.
- Patient attended an early-morning hospital shift after sleeping at 3:14 a.m.

- Patient cannot remember the last conversation that did not include: medical school, grades, research, shadowing, or the MCAT.

- Patient continues to state: “I chose this.”, “I should be grateful.” “Everyone else can handle it.” “I’m fine.”

BEHIND THE PRE-MEDICAL MIND

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LETTER TO THE READERS

To our readers,

We are beyond grateful to be introducing *Behind the Pre-Medical Mind* to you! As our team is made up of Pre-Medical students at UCR, we were well aware of the hidden struggles behind being a part of this pathway– struggles that clearly aren't talked about enough. We have all been, and seen our pre-med peers, lost in knowing what to do to reach their end goals. It's too easy for pre-meds to feel defeated in their journey since they constantly have the self-doubt of not being worthy enough for admission, which, unfortunately, can harm their confidence and mental health entirely. And knowing how intensely this experience can affect a student, my team had the passionate desire to address it.

Throughout working on this project, we had to overcome many difficulties with inconsistent communication and teamwork. We would have discussions last minute and still not have a solid, concrete plan. This, along with having the time constraint that we did, resulted in us not being on the same page half the time– not in a way that led to disagreements, but one that caused us to be unaware of the details of what we were working on. However, when we took the time to talk about where exactly this project was going and the roles everyone was assigned to, everything started to work out and come together cohesively. Our team was able to create a meaningful, harmonious work that we are incredibly honored to share.

In the end, we want our readers to feel supported and understood by *Behind the Pre-Medical Mind*. The pre-medical track is daunting, and many others are experiencing the same hardships as you. Your struggles are real and relatable, and through this issue, we hope that you know you're not alone in your medical journey.

Irene Cao,
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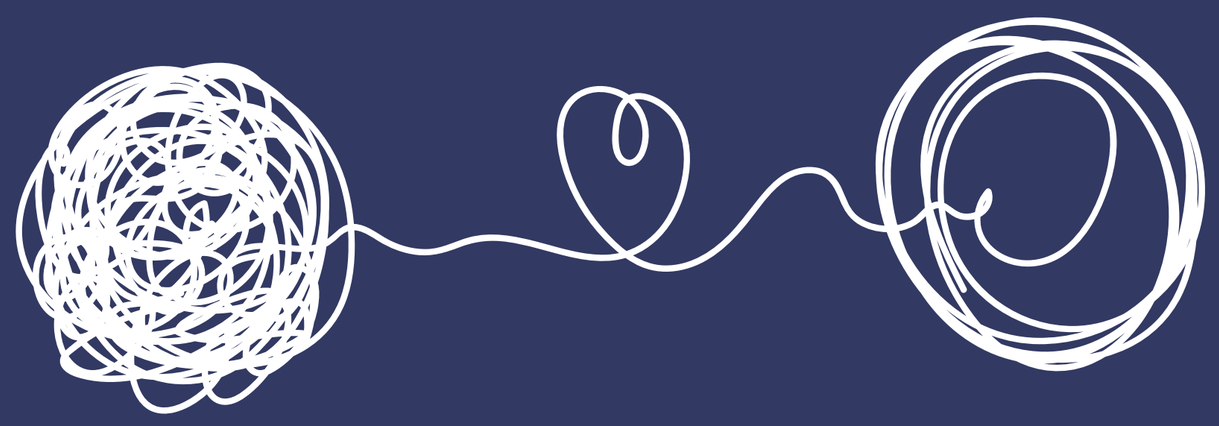
MENTAL HEALTH

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Normalize the conversation and prioritize wellness.



GRAPHICS BY DIGITALDESIGNS LAURA VIA CANVA

The Importance of Education

by: Yanhong Huang

What kind of event causes the country to come to a grinding halt? What is the Gaokao (高考)? What makes the Gaokao and education so significant within Chinese culture? The Gaokao is China's version of the National College Entrance Exam. This highly competitive exam will decide whether or not you get admitted to your dream school. More importantly, how well you do on this exam will greatly influence what your future holds. Each year, there are tens of millions of high school students who take the Gaokao exam. These students have been preparing their whole life just to maximize their score and their chance of getting into a top-ranked university. The Gaokao is a timed test, given annually, that students and parents would say is the most stressful test in the world. After being cancelled for over thirty years due to the Cultural Revolution, the Gaokao was reintroduced in 1977 as a merit-based system to give students the opportunity to be accepted into Universities based solely on their academic abilities and not based solely on their social status, political connection, etc.

Education has become extremely important within Chinese Society since historically it is believed that education provides individuals with the ability to "climb" up the social ladder and achieve success. The cultural beliefs and tradition of China created the perception that education is not just a means of acquiring knowledge but also a powerful tool that allows an individual to shape their own identity, meet the expectations of their family, and create social mobility for themselves or their family. For many Chinese students, going to school is not just about gaining an education but about changing the lives of their families for generations to come. At the core of this educational system lies the Gaokao, also known as China's National College Entrance Exam. The Gaokao is a high-stakes test that determines a student's university placement, and ultimately, in many cases, it will also influence the direction of that individual's life.

Historical tradition, cultural values, and modern economic pressure combine to place extreme value on academic success within Chinese culture. The significance placed on education in Chinese culture comes from a lengthy historical tradition and both past and present-day cultural values. Additionally, due to the fact that China is currently experiencing rapid growth in its economy, academic success has never before been more valuable. Millions of students in China consider the Gaokao as the most important examination in existence. Each year, these millions of students sit down to take the Gaokao.

Most countries, especially Western nations, evaluate students using multiple criteria such as coursework completed, participation in extracurricular activities, and standardized testing results when evaluating students for possible acceptance into University. However, when it comes to the Gaokao, students are primarily judged on their performance on this single standardized test. In almost every case, a student's score on the Gaokao will dictate which university they can attend. There have been cases, notably the Beijing Renmin scandal, where the admission director was convicted of accepting over 3.6 million in bribes to accept unqualified students. Since higher education means greater access to good-paying jobs and careers, people are willing to do whatever it takes to get a good education. A person's ability to find quality employment and advance in their career is heavily impacted by what they have learned in school. Therefore, education is one of the best ways to improve your chances of rising through the ranks of the working class. In addition to providing a means for advancing economically, education is also believed to provide the knowledge necessary for successful participation in today's fast-paced world. Education allows innovation, and with innovation follows an advancing economy. With education, students with skills and knowledge are able to succeed in the rapidly changing economy. In today's global marketplace, people need to be able to compete in a world where new technologies are constantly being developed and old ones are being replaced. An educated workforce will help China compete with other countries.

Information taken from:

- Winston Mok's *China's evolving political economy, as seen through gaokao scramble*
- Zoey Zhang's *How China imperial exam leaves historical footprint, and impact on gaokao, modern education*
- Austin Ramzy's *Corruption Scandal Hits One of China's Top Universities*
- Xinhua's article *on China's Guangxi enhances services of basic education development*



Image credits: Xie Guiming for Visual China Group

Education is also important because it is a way to prepare for a variety of different careers. The curriculum the school teaches are science, math, literature, foreign language and social studies. By taking these types of courses, students are prepared to enter a wide range of careers. Therefore education gives students the best shot at deciding what type of job to pursue after graduation. China values education above all else. Education is a symbol of hope for the Chinese people, because it holds a promise for improvement of the socio economic situation for millions of people. In China, there are over 1 billion people living within a relatively small amount of land. With such a large population, finding employment and improving one's standards of living are challenging tasks. Parents that were born in the 19th century most likely did not grow up well off, so at a young age they would leave school to start working. At that time there was no labor laws stopping teens from working at a young age. When the Chinese started to modernize, new labor prevented kids from working, and funding allowed students to get a better education. Therefore, parents slowly leaned towards pressuring their children to do good at school and find a good paying job.

A child's education is very important to the overall well-being of their family. When a child performs well academically, they are helping to raise the family income and provide a brighter future. In many Chinese families, it is common for the whole family financial security depends on how well the children perform in school. As the parents went of working at a young age and did not finish school. A person without proper education is unlikely to find a high paying job. This is especially true in poorer families, since the children are seen as the only source of potential income. If a family has limited resources and does not send their children to school, then those children will grow up to live in poverty. Therefore, education is seen as a way out of poverty. Parents in China put a great deal of effort into their children's education. During the Gaokao, parents are seen helping their kids cram a few more practice questions. After the exam parents would wear qipao symbolizing a "successful start". Some parents would spend countless amounts of time and money on private tutors and special cram schools. Many parents sacrifice their own needs for the benefit of their children. Parents view their children's education as an investment for the family future. They believe that by doing everything possible to ensure their children get a good education, they will increase their chances of having a successful and happy future.

Chinese students studying for Gaokao often spend many hours per day studying and practicing. Their daily routine typically consists of waking up early each morning to begin studying immediately. After a quick breakfast, they sit down at their desk and start reviewing notes until lunch. School begins at noon and lasts until 6pm, at which point they head back home and eat dinner and continue studying until bedtime. THe majority of students do not have much free time outside of school. They usually don't go out with friends unless they absolutely have to. During vacation periods, many students travel to big cities like Beijing and Shanghai to take additional college prep courses. This Gaokao serves as the keystone of China's education system. The Gaokao not only provides an entrance into a university and college system but also defines who you are. It has become so important due to Chinese history, current day econ competition and cultural values. Although this system encourages students with high levels of motivation and academic performance, it does create extreme amounts of stress for students and forms that way students define their own success and self worth.

FAILURE IN THIS GENERATION'S PRE-MEDS

BY: IRENE CAO



FEATURES

Most, if not all, university students are academically high achievers. This acts absolutely no surprise; when students enter a higher level of education, their ultimate end-goal is to advance their career with such. Hence, the degree, required core classes, connections, and so on is fundamentally means to an end. However, if attending medical school is the goal after undergrad, each element of their education is fragile, and they cannot afford to botch any part of it as the rigor demanded of them is extreme. Oumou, in her blog Oumou's Personal Posts, is a pre-med student that gave an example of her failing as an undergraduate student as she received a low score of thirty-eight percent on her organic chemistry exam. Her reaction to the grade was extreme as she entered a severe emotional episode. Failure for current day pre-medical students is intensified due to the mentally detrimental effects of the changing generations.

Today's pre-med students belong in a generation that experiences higher levels of stress compared to older generations, which only adds on to the increased stress they already have from their career pathway. After Oumou saw her low score, she had a whole day ahead of her with her family that could have been a healthy distraction away from her unfortunate circumstance. Nevertheless, the "one thing" she could think about was "[her] failure". It intruded and invaded her mind in a way that left her in a distressful emotional state of well-being. Even during an action movie, which can easily preoccupy one's mind, Oumou "could only see the thirty-eight" as "dread filled inside [her]"(Oumou). To Oumou, nothing else held enough importance to simply, just give a second-thought to. Her stress levels exceeded the point of mental functionality. This state is common amongst younger adults as statistics run in the year 2022 showed that "sixty-two percent of women" and "fifty-one percent of men" both in the group of "ages eighteen to thirty-four" feel that "most days they are completely overwhelmed by stress" (APA). This percentage was the most out of each age group, decreasing as the generations got older. Hence, Generation Z (Gen Z) has reached levels of stress that no other generation has which causes them severe mental drainage. This leads to a fatigue that impacts the overall happiness of young-adults as they have trouble finding genuine enjoyment under the tense conditions of simply living. Maintaining self care as a medical student with grueling requirements holds to be incredibly challenging in itself– being a part of a statistically mentally anxious group leaves no room for a peaceful existence.

Gen Z's heightened stress levels can be attributed to two main factors: digital reliance and economic troubles. Regarding the digital world, it is well known that Gen Z represents an era of understanding technology as if it was a second language, this generation has not known life without it. One of the most widely used applications of Gen Z is social media. Every generation uses it a fair amount, but only Gen Z has most of its population spending at least "one hour daily" on social media (McKinsey Health Institute). The immoderate implementation of social media eventually associated itself with the psychological concept of the fear of missing out, commonly referred to as FoMO. FoMO, as this feeling grows in a person statistically, significantly "lowers levels of general mood" and negatively impacts "overall life satisfaction" (Przybylski et al.). As a society, humans naturally compare themselves to their peers and envy arises as people desire what they yet to have. Social media inflates these emotions as it acts as an easy, quick way to access other people's lives and when users post, they mainly are broadcasting their achievements. With this, the feeling of falling behind and not being enough overwhelms a person– causing them anxiety and fear that they will not be viewed as acceptable when others have, subjectively, so much more. In terms of a medical career, thoughts of being disappointed in one's own GPA, clinical hours, extracurriculars, MCAT clouds a pre-med's mind as they constantly compare themselves and think that they should have performed better. This unhealthy, self-demeaning attitude is an example that can lead to the ever-occurring stress of students. Furthermore, the growing costs to just being a university student contributes to pressure that Gen Z faces. Between the years 1995-96, the average cost of a public four-year institution was $5,940 per year, while in 2025-2026, the average cost was $11,950 per year (Ma et al. 3). The price of education doubled in just one decade, adding a new worrisome factor to students. Now, students need to find ways of coping with the intimidating amount of money they owe a university. It is quite common to see college students that have part time jobs in order to afford higher education. Being employed as a student means to take time away from one's studies. They have the trouble of midterms and finals, along with working long shifts to have the privilege of taking an exam that can benefit their future. Pre-med students that need to work jobs also need to make time for their intense coursework and research/clinical/volunteering hours. This daunting workload can seem almost impossible to do all at once. Yet, it is the unfortunate reality of students that chose this rigorous pathway.

The increase of competitiveness of medical school leads pre-med students to dread any mistake they happen to make. Oumou's score terrified her in a way that spiraled. First, she was afraid of the straightforward consequences, how she was going to "get [her] grade up for the class", but it eventually led to her fearing that she lost her chance at getting into medical school (Oumou). It is easy to assume that Oumou is merely exaggerating the repercussions of her score– one grade on an exam, out of the hundreds of other grades she would receive could not affect her future that intensely. However, to her and every pre-med student this is not simply a case of being overdramatic. In 2006, the average measurable statistics for matriculated medical students was as followed: a 510 on the MCAT and a 3.64 GPA. For 2025, the average statistics were a 512 on the MCAT and a 3.81 GPA (AAMC). There is an overall increase of statistics in the trend for what the average accepted medical student should achieve. These numbers are not easily accomplished, they are near perfect. And it is that near-perfection that is demanded out of students that wish to pursue medicine. The margin of error that pre-med students have in underperforming is small, they cannot afford to make mistakes if the consequence is losing the future that they put so much effort into. An academic slip up, though it may seem minor, can have major career expenses. These expectations are relentless as pre-med students are put into a psychological state of survival. Hence, their academics become suffocating as they are in constant fear of their performance not meeting the minimum standards. As young adults, this aspect of their life takes away their right of having flaws. Therefore, when a pre-med student's grade suffers, so does their mental health which has worse repercussions. Burnout and low self esteem could further diminish their confidence and work ethic, which inevitably causes a cycle of academics defining self-worth.

Overall, due to the consequences of being a pre-medical student in this current generation, failure is escalated to the extreme and causes an incredible amount of mental toll. Oumou's feelings when receiving a low score is representative of her generation. Her stress is heightened due to Gen Z living as a population with perpetual worry over the circumstances they were given. Furthermore, as a Gen Z pre-med student, she is terrified of the recent competitiveness of medical school where failure has the potential to ruin her dreams. Oumou's experience relates to every pre-medical student that exists currently. Although the modern day circumstances are incredibly unfortunate, there is not much that can be done to change them. However, individual mindsets have the ability to be altered. Failure, though formidable, should not seize one's value to themself. To survive in this generation, to find genuine happiness, one must take the initiative to remember aspects of their life that make them worthwhile.

GRAPHICS BY ADRIEN COQUETTE VIA CANVA

THE EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE PRE-MEDICAL EXPERIENCE

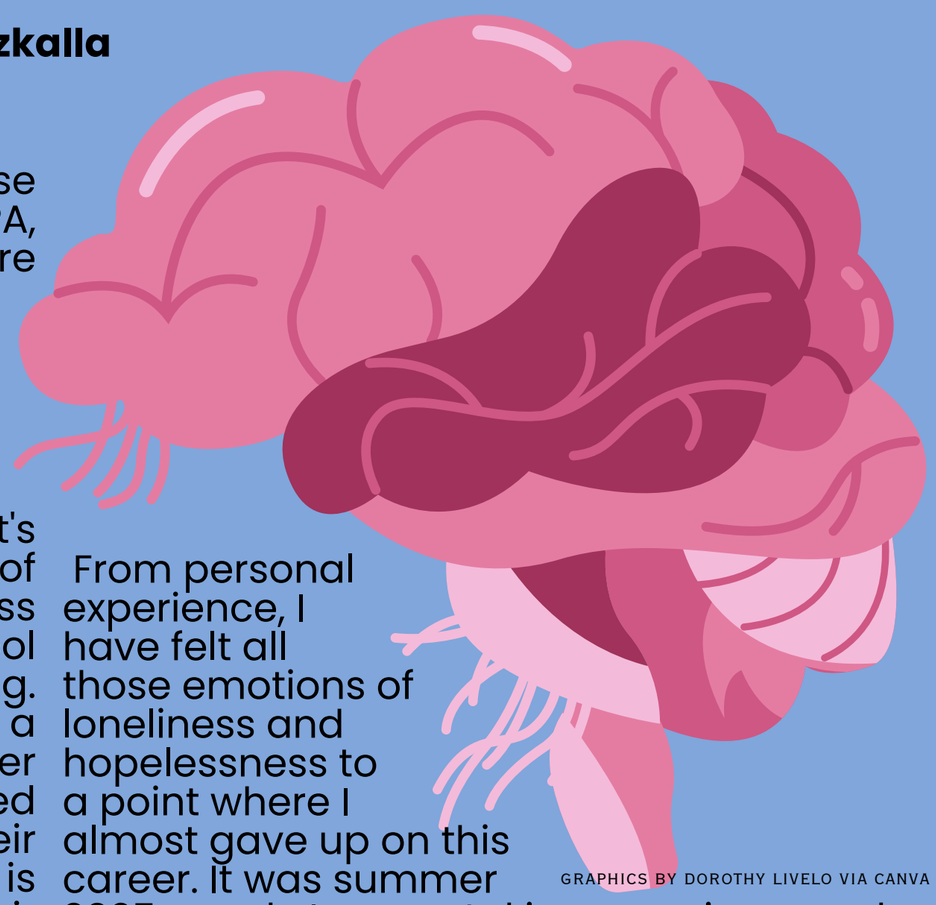
By: Miriam Rezkalla

Students are told that their mental health matters, and that their grades shouldn't define their worth. However, when expectations of a demanding career seem unattainable, mental health is the first thing that is sacrificed. Unfortunately, this is the hard reality of many pre-medical students. The AAMC or Association of American Medical Colleges have published a data table revealing that the application process is getting harder for pre-medical students. Students on the pre-medical track are obligated to perform with the increasing standards of competitive applicants at the negative consequence of their own well-being. The increased medical school entry requirements pushes students to an unhealthy degree, creating emotions of loneliness and hopelessness for their path to medical school.

Loneliness is amongst many emotions students on the pre-med track experience. This is the unfortunate side of a student's life when it comes to pursuing this profession. When highly demanding professions expect above average performance, students are forced to spend more time focusing on how to become the competitive applicant this career demands. According to a data table by AAMC, between the years 2002 to 2026, the average GPA of matriculants has increased from a 3.61 to a 3.8. (Association of American Medical Colleges). This may not seem like a big jump, however to pre-med students this makes getting into medical school much more competitive. A GPA of a 3.8 would suggest that students are expected to average an A- grade in their classes, which is difficult to accomplish. Classes like organic chemistry, physics, biochemistry, and biology are courses that require students to put their commitment, time, and dedication into every single day to achieve a high score in the class. As a pre-med student, I personally struggled with feeling lonely because of the effort, time, energy, and commitment I am required to put into my classes. Often, I feel like I need to stay home and away from distractions because of guilt for not giving my absolute best in studying. But, at what cost? In the end, I always felt lonely and isolated from what I saw as a normal college student's social life. My college roommates are both non-science majors that often attend social events that I've missed out on not only to attempt to pass an exam, but to ensure I studied enough to get an A, the grade I am expected to earn. After having spent years studying for a career and sacrificing time with family and friends, these isolated feelings of loneliness have become constant, essentially causing bigger problems of depression and anxiety. In addition to GPA, pre-med students also worry about the MCAT exam, which is just as important.

The MCAT is an exam that tests biology, biochemistry, chemistry, physics, psychology, sociology, and critical analysis and reasoning skills. It is a 7 hour long exam that requires months of studying. The AAMC indicates that there has been a significant difference in the average matriculant scores on the MCAT. The average score in 2002 was a 27.0, which translates to a 504 MCAT score. In comparison, the average score in 2026 is a 512. (Association of American Medical Colleges). The pressure increases for a student not only because they must maintain an average of a 3.8 GPA but also because they are expected to score above a 512 on an exhaustive exam.

To become competitive with these changing scores in the MCAT and GPA, students would need to spend more time on their academics. This means having to say no to hang outs, no to family events, and no to any distractions. In turn, students may feel alone, leading to bigger consequences on a student's mental health. These emotions of sadness, frustration, and hopelessness makes the journey to medical school more isolating than rewarding. Although loneliness can start off as a mere feeling, it may become a greater challenge, when it has compromised the way a doctor handles their patients. When mental health is impaired, doctors may showcase their underlying emotions to their patients, which is unprofessional and should be avoided. It is essential that there is more attention on mental health in pre-medical students in order to prevent underlying consequences in future professionals. Hopelessness is another major consequence some students face in their pathway of applying into medical school. As previously mentioned, the statistics in the AAMC data table imply that every year becomes more competitive for students applying to medical school and the rate of students getting accepted becomes lower. Students have to put their best foot forward to try and beat the statistics that may determine the life they will have after graduation. However, sometimes things don't go as planned for students aiming for these scores. Often, students may get a low score on an exam, or may score lower than average on the MCAT, which unfortunately makes students question if this profession is even worth it. Thoughts of " Am I even capable of becoming a doctor?" or "What if all these late nights and sacrifices don't pay off at the end" run through a student's head. This can harm a student's mental health and create anxiety, burnout, and ultimately hopelessness. Depressive Symptoms, Burnout, and Declining Medical Career Interest Among Premedical Students", an article by the National Library of Medicine conducted a research study with 390 pre-medical students and concluded that "respondents who experienced more depressive symptoms and higher levels of burnout over the course of the academic year reported significant reductions in the medical career interest" (Grace)." When these types of emotions arise, students' motivation and well-beingcan be negatively affected, and lose all hope in a dream they have worked on for years. It is unfortunate that students have reached a point of extreme academic pressure where emotions have overwhelmed them to a degree where they give up on their passion and what their hearts have always desired for.



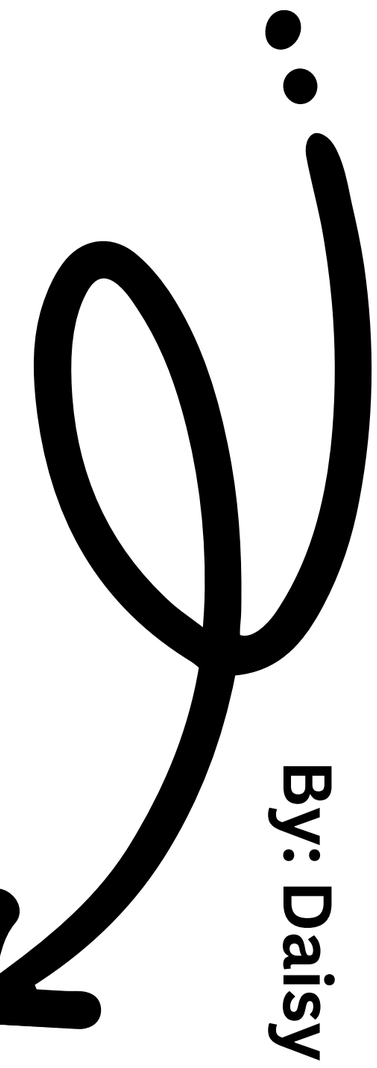
GRAPHICS BY DOROTHY LIVELO VIA CANVA

From personal experience, I have felt all those emotions of loneliness and hopelessness to a point where I almost gave up on this career. It was summer 2025, and I was taking a nine week accelerated organic chemistry course. In those nine weeks, I have never felt more hopeless and lonely. I was staying alone in my college apartment while my family went on vacation and I had to miss out on many social gatherings, and overall my summer experience. On top of that, I was struggling with this course. From the moment I woke up to the moment I slept I was constantly studying, and even then I was still scoring horribly. Ultimately, it ruined my GPA and I knew that with the GPA I had and having looked at the current statistics, I would never make it to medical school. I felt defeated and unmotivated to keep pushing and for a moment there I thought, " Do I even want to be a doctor?". All my life, I knew I wanted to help people and join a service to help my community, but at that very moment, it made me forget why I ever wanted to become a doctor. This is what happens to a majority of pre-medical students who are fighting the pressures of becoming a qualified applicant. It is important that students realize that their well being shouldn't be on the line of sacrifice to pursue a career. Students should know that while the pressure gets hard to handle, numbers do not define their capability of becoming a doctor. When a person graduates and becomes a doctor, MCAT score or GPA isn't the usual question people ask to see a qualified doctor. Instead, patients want to see compassion in their physician, one who desires a healthy life for them, which is ultimately a far better reward than numbers. A doctor who goes to their job happy and accomplished rather than burnt out, lonely and hopeless is significantly more fulfilling to patients, which is why it matters that students' mental health is protected and supported throughout this difficult journey.

Ultimately, the increased requirements for medical school entry pushes students to a harmful degree of pressure, essentially creating a damaging mindset filled with emotions of loneliness and hopelessness. Patients prefer a professional environment with a doctor who can fill a room with trust and empathy. A doctor who possesses these qualities offers a far better experience than a doctor who is struggling with their mental health.

Decline in Mental Health Students

By: Daisy Herrera



Mental Health rates are greatly declining due to college students receiving high amounts of stress and anxiety that generally goes undiagnosed. Gen Z, like past generations, have endured various mental health struggles that are caused by college, social media, and other daily factors. This is mainly seen within college as they are faced with a high amount of stress due to school work, managing a personal life, and their overall performance rate. Although maintaining a healthy mentality is necessary in one's life, seeing the signs of struggle, accessing care, and ultimately overcoming their troubles is not accessible for everyone.

Mental Health support centers are open to not only students, but anyone who is in need of help. As not everyone takes advantage of them, the AMFM Mental Health Treatment's article on the College mental health crisis states that, "In 2019, college counseling centers reported a 90%rise in students seeking support, causing most centers to have two to three week waitlists." (Silver, 2026) The inaccessibility of Mental Health support centers for a large periods of time leads to increases suicidal idetation among students. This is mainly seen within women, financially struggling students, and racial minorities that do not have an opportunity to receive help. As not everyone is able to receive help, they reach for various coping mechanisms in order to "escape" their struggles. One of these being social media. Today, social media has taken over the world in various ways, specifically in a college setting. Students are able to go online to make new friends, make discord chats, follow campus life, and overall interact with the school they attend. Social media is not always healthy. It may cause identity loss, bullying, sleep distractions that ultimately affect a student's function. (Bunzeski) It may affect how one views themselves as they are heavily influenced by everything that is shown online. It causes students to compare themselves to how others put their life out into the world. For example, posting videos about being a straight A student, being able to afford a free life in college, or simply unrealistic expectations society sets on college students. These are all factors that affect a students pace or perception on college, as they may as they are behind due to all the idealized expectations on social media. This later on carries into their mental health and how they choose to get help for it as it is not a topic commonly spoken about on social media. It causes declines in finding support as not many people are aware of the signs of struggle or where to begin with on their personal journey. In the end, finding mental health support whether it is online or in-person allows college students to build a healthy life while in school.

Other than social media and maintaining a stable health, college students often struggle to balance their personal life and their academic life. There are various factors that contribute to this, such as working more than one job, maintaining a high GPA for scholarships or even maintaining a healthy social life on campus. When struggling academically, students tend to let go of "small" things such as sleep or social connections that ultimately carry a great toll on their lives. As these do not seem as important, they are necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle when in school. Such factors as having friendships allows students to separate their personal and academic lives. Without them, they would simply just be students, therefore losing any sense of personal identity they once had. On the topic of sacrificing one's sleep in order to advance academically, a loss of sleep not only affects their academic life but their overall health. It may affect their overall performance in school due to the lack of sleep. They dedicate all their time to their academic studies and students begin to cut out necessary things in their life that their body needs to function. It turns into an ongoing cycle of not being able to turn off their academic life for the night and focus on building a healthy personal life. It also pushes away anyone they are close to as they choose to separate themselves from having any sort of connection in order to dedicate their time to growing academically that they are not able to grow socially. Although mental health carries a great part in student success, there are other factors such as tolls brought upon one by family that cause stress on college students. From personal experiences, there are various students at UCR that are studying a field simply by the fact that their parents want them to build a career in that area. This carries a great toll on not only their academic performance, but their overall college life as they constantly live with the pressure of succeeding for their families happiness, not their own. They are not able to study a career they enjoy simply by the fact that their families set up such high expectations for their success. This is more commonly seen within cultural families, specifically immigrant households. Most commonly, immigrant parents expect more from their children as they set up a path for success that they were not able to cross. This brings an unnecessary weight upon college students to overachieve in not only school, but in life in order to fulfill their dreams. What no one talks about is how this takes a toll on the student. How they suffer identity loss, stress, and occasionally socially struggle to find a group as they dedicate most of their time working towards someone's goals. No one speaks about the guilt behind wanting to build a better life for your parents but feeling connected to another career. Often students are expected to work while in school in order to contribute to household expenses, tuition, or simply support themselves while in school. It emphasizes how everyone's college experience is not the same. For example, what is seen as partying and enjoying their freetime, students of immigrant parents spend it studying or working as their responsibilities are always there, they do not simply disappear. Angela Osorio's story on "Weight of expectation," speaks about the life of an immigrant born child. In her story, Osorio states, "I owed it to my parents. After all, they worked so hard to get here. I couldn't disappoint them; I knew what they expected me to become."(Osorio, 2024) This emphasizes that familial pressure is one of the main sources for student stress. College students dedicate their entire college experience into feeding into others dreams that they begin to lose themselves. It causes a decline in students' mental health as they are given unnecessary expectations and stress.

Ultimately, the decline in college students' mental health is not always a stress or depression indicator, but can be the result of familial expectations, academic demands, and social media presence. Students carry the weight of balancing their personal, social, and workplace life that they suffer from identity loss. Those who come from immigrant households carry the guilt of performing up to a certain standard in order to please their parents and achieve all the expectations set upon them. Receiving a higher education should not be about living up to a certain standard or giving up your own goals; it should be about living that college experience through your own personal experiences and studying a career you most enjoy.

The DISADVANTAGES of Low-Income Pre-Medical Students

By: Irene Cao

Medicine is infamous for being one of, if not the most, rigorous and exhausting careers to devote oneself to. The challenges of medicine do not solely apply to just attending Medical School; the path of simply getting accepted is a great ordeal on its own. Moreover, obtaining the acceptance is a hurdle full of what seems like endless requirements– clinical hours, research experience, volunteer work, perfect grades, and extracurriculars that will stand out against the thousands of other applicants. It is evident that this career only allows the hardest-working, most persevering individuals to pursue it. However, these individuals must also be prepared to have the wealth that comes with affording a medical education. In Eggan et al.'s article, Premedical Education Experiences of First-Generation College Graduates, the researchers conducted a study on the experiences of low-income, first-generation pre-medical students. These students gave personal insights into the obstacles they faced in their pursuit of medicine due to their lack of financial stability. Hence, they unfairly appeared less competitive simply because of their socioeconomic status. Though the medical pathway is demanding of all applicants, students who come from low-income backgrounds face systemic barriers that lead them to be heavily disadvantaged in the admissions process compared to those with higher-income backgrounds.

Lower-income students often have to prioritize working jobs during undergrad to make ends meet, causing them to lose focus on medical school prerequisites. In the study, several participants noted that they were not able to strengthen their application due to the working hours they needed to commit to. One participant specified that "clinical exposure was… the weakest point in [their] application" as they forfeited their time to odd jobs such as bartending, dog walking, being a nanny, and making/selling clothes. Additionally, another applicant expressed that they could not "take time off to just study" since they needed to "either have a job or go to school" (Eggan et al.). These students were essentially kept from advancing their knowledge as they unwillingly had to allot time to activities unrelated to their goals. They did not have the luxury of being ignorant of expenses, they needed to work to survive, to be able to attend school just to have even a chance at a future in medicine. Consequently, as low-income students drain their energy on jobs, they lose time to dedicate to their studies as 74% of them work 15 to over 35 hours a week. And "59%" of the low-income students who work these harsh hours earn an average of "C grades or lower" (Carnevale and Smith 12). Hence, grades suffer as work hours increase– students are restricted from longer periods of studying, and attending office hours or tutoring is left inaccessible to them due to time restrictions. As these students lack the available resources to aid in their success, their sense of competitiveness in medical schools is reduced. It is crucial to note that medical schools have a high standard regarding their matriculants' academic prowess. In 2025, the average expectations were to have a 512 on the MCAT and a 3.81 GPA (AAMC). Students working towards medicine need to put in 110% of their effort to ensure high performances, if they do not understand a concept, they must work more intensely to force themselves to. Unfortunately, even if low-income students desired to have diligence to such an extent, their time is constrained by having to balance education and employment. These students do not even get the opportunity to try, and apply their best efforts; which ultimately lessens their overall chances of being accepted into medical school.

Furthermore, low-income students lack the connections and guidance that could aid them in improving other aspects of their application– such as medical-related exposures. Participants discussed the difficulty of "Not having family members anywhere near the medical field" which resulted in their struggle of being introduced to "important experiences". While their pre-med peers were "engag[ing] in activities, ask[ing] for research, and apply[ing] way ahead for opportunities", the participants felt as though they "did not know anything" (Eggan et al.). Having these medical-related experiences is crucial in a pre-med's application as in 2025, 90.1%, 54.5%, and 95% of matriculants were involved in volunteering in a healthcare field, laboratory research, and shadowing a healthcare provider, respectively (AAMC). Although low-income students can gain these opportunities through cold emails or calls, those who already have access to impressive connections have the upper hand. Higher-income students are more likely to know, if not instead related to, a healthcare provider personally as their families are of the same social class. Therefore, instead of spending their time navigating what requirements they have to meet, they can begin checking off tasks earlier and accumulate more hours of exposure. Whereas low-income pre-meds rely on the hope that a professional will accept their requests for shadowing or volunteering. Despite the amount of effort that each student puts into finding opportunities, the competitive disparity was pre-set by parental incomes. Low-income students put their all into building a network from scratch that their wealthier counterparts inherited immediately. These circumstances leave low-income pre-meds feeling outmatched against their higher-income peers.

Additionally, the sheer non-negotiable costs of affording both medical school itself, and the requirements needed for admission, lead to the discouragement of low-income students to continue striving for a career in medicine. Participants in the Premedical Education Experiences of First-Generation College Graduates study attributed their feelings of hopelessness in having a medical career to the formidable financial burden of the pathway. One participant made the stance that though individuals could be equipped with "the brains or… the skill set to get in" they "don't want to try because it's so expensive" (Eggan et al.). These expenses do not simply equate to just the tuition of medical school, but also the costs of the intermediate admission processes, such as taking the MCAT and sending applications. It is evident that each and every single step is extremely costly. Regarding the MCAT, low-income students not only had the trouble of paying $325 to attempt it, but they were also more unprepared when doing so since they could not "pull on the same resources as others" and did not possess the extra funds to spend on MCAT prep courses (Eggan et al.). To add on, since these students are inadequately prepared for the exam, they are likely to receive an unfavorable score and need to retake it. However, these individuals cannot easily afford to try again whenever necessary, as each attempt is hundreds of dollars vanishing in an instant. Furthermore, primary application fees are $170 + $43 per school, and secondary applications average $100 per school (Moss). In order to secure acceptance to medical school, pre-meds often send out as many applications as possible. For those with higher incomes, they have the privilege of perceiving money as a second thought compared to their goals, and are more willing to spend as much as they deem necessary to improve their success rate. Conversely, low-income students cannot apply this strategy, they lose the advantage of numbers that could lower the risk of being rejected from medical school. Ultimately, the entire application process and fees cost up to $10,000 for each individual (Moss). This massive upfront cost acts as a seemingly impossible barrier for pre-meds to overcome without the ability to afford it. Low-income students end up being purged from the applicant pool before their qualifications are fairly evaluated. And it is clear that many of them cannot find a way around the costs as only 5% of medical school matriculants are in the lowest household-income quintile (AAMC). Hence, wealth is a major factor in being able to even consider a future in medicine, and due to such, low-income students are excluded from a career path that should be based on merit.

Overall, due to the systemic barriers to attending medical school for those who cannot afford it, low-income pre-medical students are left at an incredible disadvantage when pursuing medicine. They cannot meet several schools' standards and expectations as their grades are likely to drop as employment takes up their time and energy, and they also accumulate fewer medical-related exposures due to not being born with connections. Moreover, the expenses of medical school actively oppose their socio-economic status as it costs thousands of dollars just to apply.

These obstacles filter out low-income students solely by their financial situation, causing medical schools to not only consider the most capable of applicants, but the wealthiest. Therefore, the medical field ends up cultivating providers born into financial privilege– lacking the necessary diversity and equality that should be prevalent in medicine. To begin the effort of making changes to the unjust medical education system, there must be more easily available resources to aid low-income pre-meds in meeting requirements. These students were dealt with unfair circumstances that institutions should actively work to dismantle. Only, once all pre-medical students are given equal opportunities, will wearing a white coat truly represent genuine work and perseverance.

ACADEMIC STRESS

BY: YANHONG HUANG

What does it mean to go through the premed process at one of the most competitive colleges/universities in the country? Paulus's 2024 article provides insight into what it means to be going through premed at Harvard University. Interviews conducted with current premed students and student advisors provided data regarding the rigorous course load of premed students, the lack of support from advising, competition for available resources and overall uncertainty regarding their future. Paulus however asks a broader question. Is pre med anxiety caused solely by the difficulty of science courses, or is it the environment of the path to medicine that creates this anxiety? If anxiety came solely from course load, then students completing identical courses should have equal amounts of stress. Paulus indicates that it is not just course load that creates this level of anxiety, but it is the system where students feel compelled to constantly prove that they are "doing enough." This system allows for constant comparison with peers, associates success directly to worth, and instills the idea that a single misstep will derail their entire future.

The first factor creating high levels of anxiety among premeds is the sense of failure to achieve progress before college has even started. In Paulus' article, Esha Ahmad recalls entering Harvard without prior research experience compared to many of her classmates. Many of her classmates entered laboratory positions within the first two weeks of class. Ahmad stated that there was no knowledge of what was expected in terms of undergraduate research for a premed, and described entering this environment as "pretty lonely," and felt that she wasn't "an adequate enough pre-med" (Paulus). The use of the word "adequate" highlights that Ahmad didn't only question her academic preparedness, but if she was worthy of being a part of the premed community. Her classmates' prior experiences established standards by which she measured her own abilities. Even though they were both entering college for the first time, they did not start from the same point. Some knew how to utilize research, clinical experience, and networking while others had to find out this information once they arrived. Therefore, the article illustrates that premed-related anxiety isn't solely due to students' inability to manage challenging coursework. It can also arise from unequal access to knowledge about opportunities available early in a person's education. Additionally, when students attribute these inequality issues to their own shortcomings, the system for becoming a doctor turns variations in back ground into variations in confidence. Furthermore, the ultimate issue is that future physicians may be selected based upon who previously learned how to navigate the system versus who has the highest capacity for learning, improving and providing quality patient care.

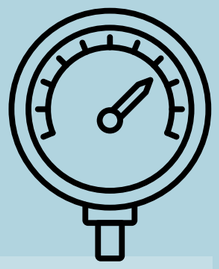
The pressure of advising pre-med students has been made greater through the fact that these students have to make some very serious and life changing decisions with out a lot of knowledge of what decision is best. As reported by Paulus, Harvard University has a relatively high percentage of pre-med students but only a few full time advisors who specialize in the pathway. Many times students must wait many weeks for appointment time, and science students do not get advice from academic department related to their non-scientific course studies. Peer advisors therefore become the first source of assistance for students struggling with doubt in themselves or being over-whelmed by "a tsunami of classes" (Paulus) . A tsunami is very powerful and disorientating and you cannot escape it, so the idea of a tsunami presents a picture of your duties coming to you quicker than you can keep up with them. Advisors do not alleviate this feeling because, in addition to taking all required classes and doing well in them, pre-med students must also think about and plan all other classes they will need to complete after graduation. They also need to look for research opportunities. They need to develop clinical experiences. They need to study for and take entrance exams for medical schools. They need to determine if they want to go to medical school immediately after graduating from college or maybe go into research for awhile before applying. Since there is no one sure way to go through the entire process of becoming a doctor, each and every choice made could be considered risky. Even choosing not to participate in an opportunity may bring anxiety about the possibility that someone else will build a better record than yours. Therefore, according to Paulus's article, uncertainty is probably the most stressful part of a pre-med education. Students are given the responsibility of developing complex long term plans, but often they are provided not enough personal support to allow them to make confident choices. To provide students with an education where they can make educated choices without being intimidated by fear, providing advising services is not optional. It is necessary.

Competition alters the role of education by converting students' classmates into competitors. According to Paulus, while many students interview in his article perceive pre-med culture as supporting and united by their common goal to assist others, some students see it as becoming more "cut throat" when competing for available research positions, clinical experiences, and extracurricular activities (Paulus). This difference is significant since it shows a paradox at the heart of a pre-med education. Students are training to be professionals in a field built around teamwork and caring for people yet the process of getting admitted to medical school may cause them to focus on competing against other students for access to available opportunities. While students may be learning the same scientific materials together in a classroom setting, individually they are also working on different aspects of their own applications that will eventually be compared. This creates an atmosphere where assisting another student can be perceived as a risk, although collaborating with fellow students would likely benefit everyone involved in the learning process. Competition can also lead students to select extracurriculars based upon how they present to potential admitters rather than how valuable they are. Volunteer work, research projects, and clinical experiences can evolve into something to check off the list versus an opportunity to serve or grow intellectually. Therefore, the burden of competition does not come only from the amount of work assigned. The belief that each hour must be used towards a future application causes added tension. Time spent resting, engaging in hobbies or taking unrelated courses may start to be seen as time not used effectively. Paulus's article disputes the notion that competition always results in more successful students. While competition may force students to work harder, it can also limit a student's ability to explore curiously, form friendships and honestly evaluate their own abilities. A program designed to produce compassionate physicians should not promote competition among its students.

Pre-med stress comes from a deep concern that all their efforts may be for nothing. At the conclusion of Paulus's article, Paulus quotes student M. H. Hans Bach-Nguyen who states, "the work is hard. The fear of the future is hard." (Paulus) In this example, he emphasizes two distinct types of burden using the word “hard.” The first type is physical, where students must study and complete homework assignments, and have time for other activities outside of academics. The second type is less visible, however potentially more devastating for students who cannot determine if there will ever be reward for their effort. Consequently, each essay grade earned and exam taken can relate to all aspects of a student's life. Therefore, what might otherwise be simply a bad grade appears to be a threat to a student's potential identity. The article also explores why many pre-med students are hesitant to take a year off prior to applying to medical schools -- even though taking a year off would likely give students much-needed relief from the pressures of studying, and allow them additional time to review material prior to taking exams. One possible explanation for their hesitation is that students believe that taking time away from the process demonstrates lack of commitment to the pre-med track. Furthermore, seeing classmates continue through the process creates feelings of guilt when deciding to take time off. Ultimately, the pre-med path teaches students to endure stress rather than consider changes in how fast or structured the process is. Something alarming is that since these students aspire to enter professions which are committed to improving health, they may develop ways to improve the lives of future patients while neglecting their own fatigue, anxiety and need for emotional support. Overall, Paulus's article implies that the stresses experienced by pre-med students come from more than just having to deal with challenging coursework. The students experience inequality based on their level of preparation, limited advising, and intense competition for spots in programs, and an ongoing sense of uncertainty regarding whether they will actually gain entry to medical school. Each of these factors can lead students to perceive being unfamiliar with how things work as proof that they are ineffective. Additionally, these same factors can create a competitive environment among peers, creating a feeling where one poor academic performance results in a loss of an entire future. Therefore, colleges should provide better access to advising for pre-med students. College advisors should encourage collaboration/competition among pre-med students. Finally, college advisors should discourage viewing a gap year or making a decision to alter their plan as a failure. Since pre-med students aspire to become physicians, colleges should educate these students that maintaining their own health and wellness is a vital aspect of becoming responsible physicians.



Parental Pressure that causes Mental Health Issues



By: Daisy Herrara

People often choose their career path due to their parents' dreams. This is mainly seen in immigrant households as they immigrate to different countries in search of better opportunities not only for themselves, but for the future of their family. The stereotypical careers immigrant parents seek for their children consist of doctors, lawyers, engineers, or simply any high paying job that will allow their children to support them in the future. As they set the bar high, the immense pressure and standards cause various mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, identity loss, and even suicidal thoughts from their families depending on them to build them a better life.

Immigrant parents are often stereotyped with the fact that they want their children to build a career in healthcare. Whether it is by being a nurse, doctor, nurse practitioner, or dentist, they simply wish for a prestigious role that will be rewarded with a high income. This is simply for the fact of wanting their children to support their future due to all the sacrifices they made settling in a foreign country. Although it does benefit the parents, the pressure of having to perform to a certain standard in order to make your parents proud heavily weighs down their children's mental health. Pamela Wible's article "Why Parents Force Kids to Be Doctors," emphasizes how being the child of an immigrant working in healthcare and actually doing the job are two different things. Wible shares an email exchange she had with a physician regarding the physician's mental well-being. She states she received a message reading, "Please help me" from a First-generation Korean American whose parents dreamt of them gaining a career as a physician or pharmacist.(Wible, 2022) As her sister previously went the pharmacist route, the future of becoming the family physician depended on her. This led her to having several suicidal thoughts and falling hard into depression. She constantly carried pressure and stress from her family leading up to her career that when she was living in the moment, she met her breaking point. The topic of depression among health care workers, specifically those of immigrant children is not talked about as not everyone is aware of the fear these individuals constantly live in. The fear of being a failure and not making your parents sacrifices worth it or not being the best in what you do, both lead to mental health struggles. It emphasizes how children often choose a career in medicine to achieve their parents' own dreams in life, not because they truly have a passion for medicine. It all leads back to having this constant pressure since birth to perform a certain way, that you are never truly able to focus on what is in your best interest, not your families.

Students often live a double life. This is mainly seen through the struggle of being told to express yourself in a school setting but going home to a strict household that believes having fun pulls you away from success. Immigrant children are greatly affected by this due to the fact that they live within two different cultures. They often fall into western stereotypes of being able to maintain a well balanced school and personal life, whereas typical Asian stereotypes for example, believe in staying away from anything that removes your focus from success. This is mainly due to how different cultures and generations grew up with different opportunities in their country. Wible's client is a prime example of Asian parents wanting more for their children since birth as they assigned their children a career since they were born. This causes identity loss as they are not able to develop into their own persona as they constantly live under the pressure to perform to a certain standard from both cultures. This leads to anxiety as they feel out of place in a school setting as they do not fully identify themselves in their career, but carry a sense of disappointment at home that leads to mental health disorders.

Disappointment is one of the main reasons pre-med students often have suicidal thoughts or any other life-altering mental health issues. This is merely by the fact that when presenting a struggle to their immigrant parents, they are hit with all the sacrifices they have endured to get their children to where they are. Wible states, "A medical diploma proves mommy and daddy did everything for their kids and were the best parents ever!" (Wible, 2022) When expressing any sort of emotion regarding their stress or depression due to their career path, immigrant parents are quick to shut it down due to the fact that they believe it to not be as challenging as the obstacles they have faced. They often shame their children by stating they are ungrateful for their sacrifices or that they simply do not care for their families future. This is not the case at all. Pre-med students pull away from their personal dreams in order to fulfill their families dreams. This self-lessness leads to a constant state of depression that takes them a life-time to get over. The sense of feeling like they are not able to achieve those goals has spiked the cases in suicide among pre-med students. This is due to not being able to resort to parental help as they view it as a sign of weakness. They are not traditionally exposed to the topic of mental health which leads to them viewing such struggles as depression as a minor setback.

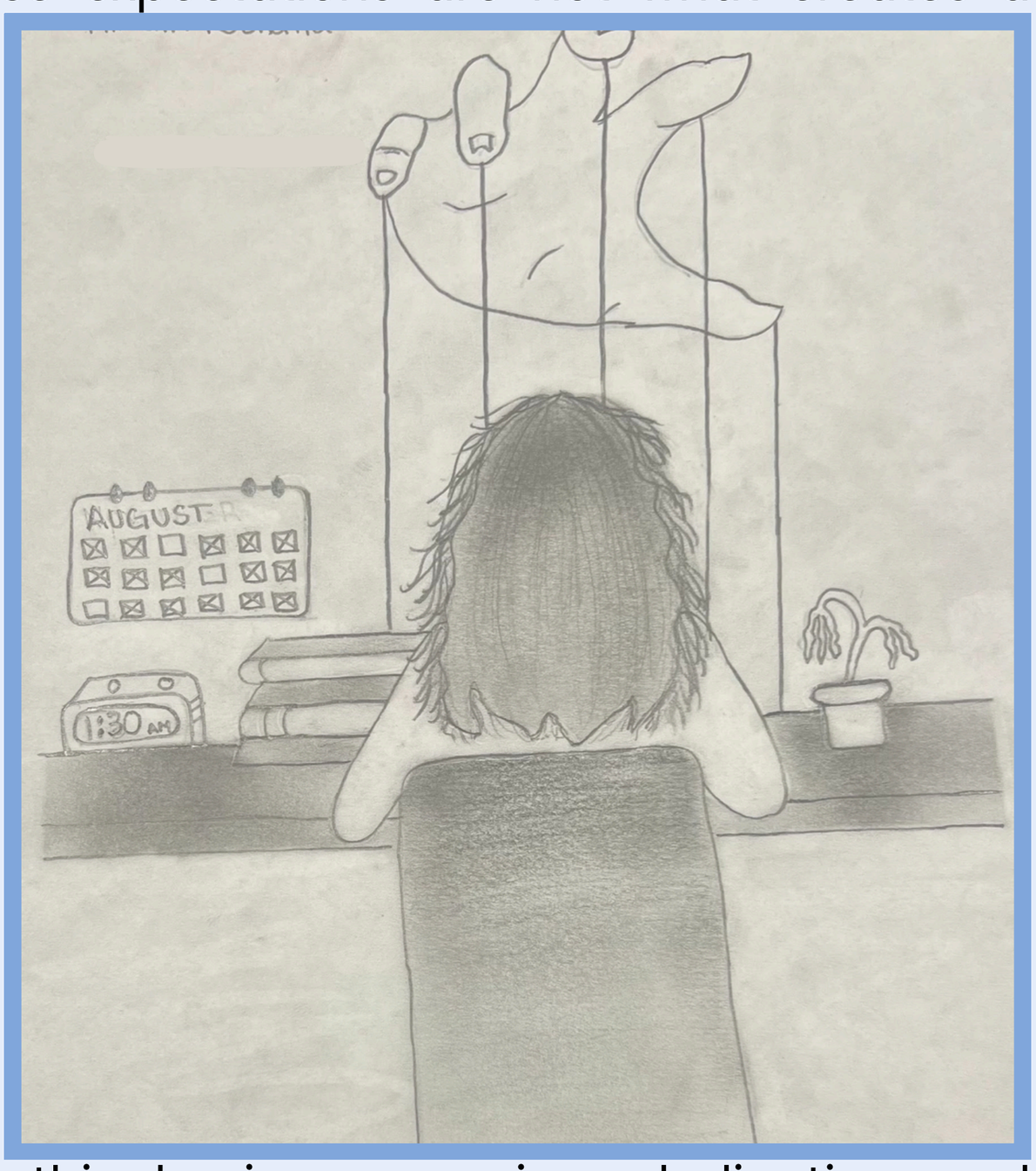
First-generation students, primarily children of immigrant parents, constantly carry an immense amount of stress and pressure to overachieve in the medical field. This evidently leads to struggles with depression, anxiety, and identity loss that affects their overall performance. Their success in a well-rounded, high paying position determines their families future as a whole. Without seeking what is best for their mental health and personal future, they risk the fear of losing their battles against their mental health struggles.

STRINGS OF SACRIFICE

BY: MIRIAM REZKALLA

When children are asked what they want to be when they grow up, they pick what their heart desires. However, what they will realize as they grow up is that the path is not easy. As with many careers, the path to becoming a physician requires years of hard work and sacrifice, which often comes at the expense of one's mental health.

The increased expectations of applying to medical school has taken control over pre-medical students, costing them their mental well being . For example, in the drawing of a girl studying, there is a hand above her with strings attached imitating a puppet. Every string is an expectation that has controlled this girl's life, and having her stay up late at night studying with no time to take care of herself. Like this girl, pre-medical students face extreme pressure to live up to the increased average MCAT, GPA, clinical hours and extracurricular activities. This pressure can take control of one's life, with the price of their mental health. However, these expectations are not what creates a qualified doctor and it should not control a student's everyday life. Life is not about the months of studying for the MCAT or the late night study sessions to maintain a high GPA. Students should not be controlled by the growing expectations of a demanding career, but rather take control of focusing on the effort and not the outcome. It is not the MCAT or GPA that one has that creates a worthy doctor, it is compassion and empathy that makes a suitable physician.



When a student's life is controlled by the endless standards of a demanding career, time slips away from their fingers and students forget to take care of what's most important, their mental health. For instance, a withering flower is seen next to the girl with frizzy hair who is studying on her desk. This student has sacrificed her time and energy into her academics and it has cost her well being. A growing individual should prioritize their mental health to prevent underlying emotions that affect their professional career in their future. While this business requires dedication and perseverance, it also requires a stable mindset. It is extremely important that doctors are mentally healthy to prevent medical errors. "Physician Burnout: Causes, Consequences, and (?) Cures" an article by the National Library of Medicine claims that, " The litany of burnout characteristics—especially closed thinking, impaired memory, decreased attention, and viewing people as objects—can easily lead to medical error." (Fred, Schied). Ultimately, patients are not asking for a doctor's MCAT or GPA. Patients want a physician's time, attention and understanding. A doctor can not give their patients these qualities if their mental health is compromised. It is important that every person interested in pursuing this career is able to protect their mental health and be able to balance a healthy lifestyle with their academics and their outside life.

Overall, the increasing standards of medical school is a weight pre-medical students have to carry, and can significantly impact their well being. This consequence can affect their careers as they treat their patients later in life, producing a larger and more harmful result.

Behind the books

by: Daisy Herrara
ft. Susan Vasquez

Entering college as a Pre-med student comes with its challenges. Whether it is financial, physical, or social challenges, they all collectively add up to create one's experience. As every Pre-med student has their own story, they are able to relate to one another on different levels. Fellow UCR student, Susan Vasquez is a third year Biology major on the Pre-med track. She emphasizes the challenges she has faced entering college as a first generation student seeking a career in medicine. She states, “Coming into college I have faced the constant fear of failure and disappointing my parents.” The parental weight of performing to a certain level is what immensely affects Pre-med students. It is the standards they are given to accomplish their parents' own dreams of building a career in medicine.

As one is constantly given pressure to overachieve in college, it affects the student more than usual. Vasquez states that, “The constant struggle and stress has affected my mental health greatly due to the fear of familial disappointment, as well as the feeling like I don’t deserve to study medicine.” Mental health is very important when entering college. You face various academic and personal struggles that cause high levels of stress. Maintaining a stable mental health allows you to perform your best for yourself and your future.

Many students do not take into consideration their own well-being as their main concern is their families goals and aspirations. Although wanting to build a better future for your family is not wrong, you have to take into consideration your own mental and physical well-being as in the long run you are the one going into that work force.



GRAPHICS BY MERGY VIA CANVA



Pre-Med Culture

BY MIRIAM REZKALLA

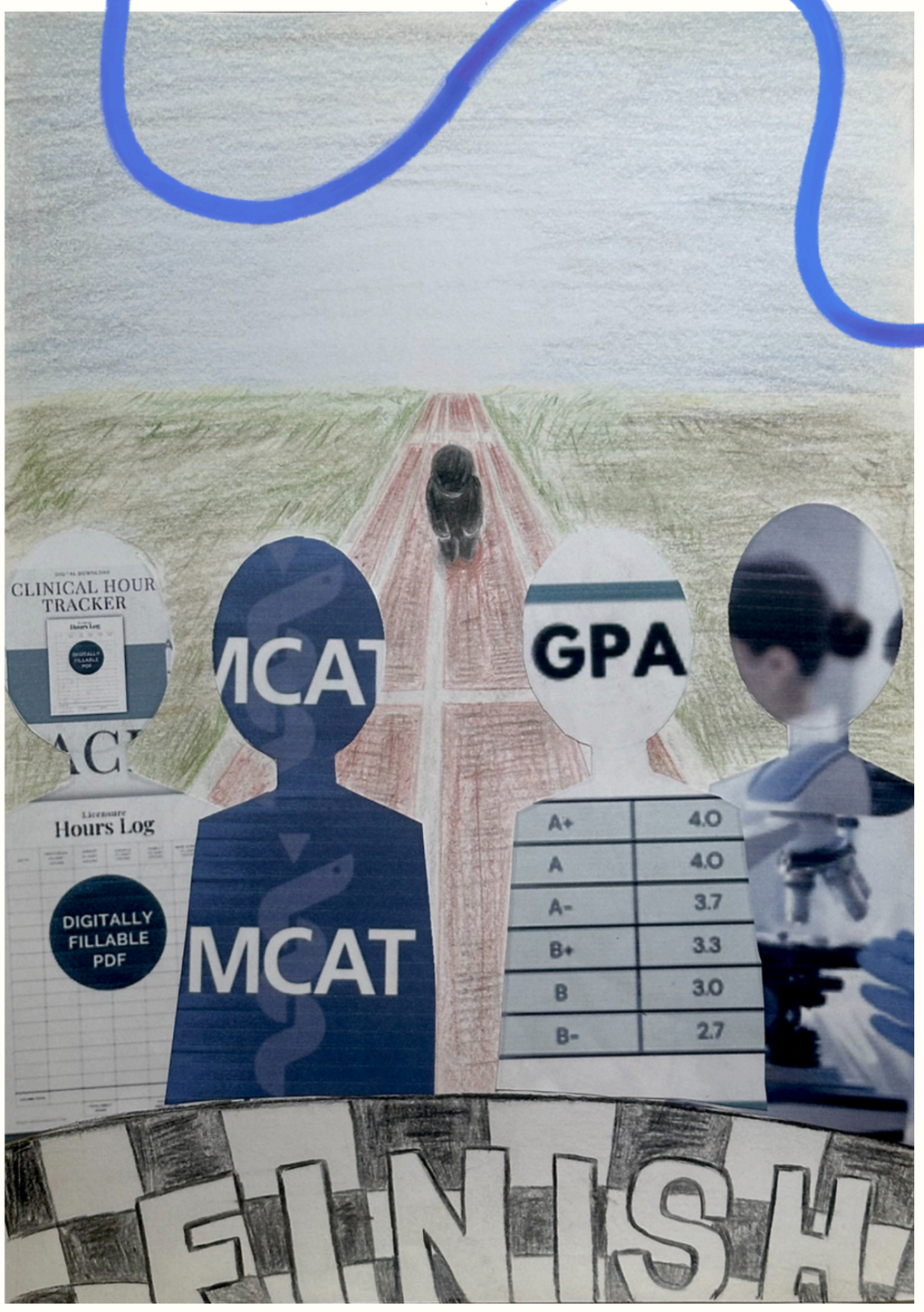


IMAGE BY: IRENE CAO

" The MCAT is a BEAST and takes a toll on Everyone's mental health. If you can't be proud of your practice scores, be proud ofthe practice itself. Walk into that testing center with confidence, a good head on your shoulders and you can easily grab up to 5 points by having a better mental state than other test takers during the 5 hours. Good luck everyone!"
- r/MCAT Reddit User

"Does anyone else feel like their mental health is just at an all time low during this mcat study period. im just so stressed, irritated and I really don't know what to do to handle all these emotions. sometimes it really makes me think is med school even for me and isny this gonna just feel 10x worse when i get into medical school"
- r/MCAT Reddit User

The MCAT, a 7 hour, long, exhaustive exam is known for the toll it takes on students' mental health. MCAT Scores, GPA, and other standards to apply to medical school have increased and created a competitive environment for students. Unfortunately, it has left pre-meds no choice but to sacrifice their mental health to perfect their medical school application.

Students use the MCAT and GPA to define their worth, completely disregarding the hard work and effort they have been putting into the entire admissions process. It is important for students to protect their mental health because it is indicative of their quality of work. Whether it is studying for an exam or working as a doctor, it is important that a persons well being is stable to ensure exceptional work.

Ultimately, it is not the MCAT or GPA that will create a qualified doctor. It is the character of a person that is most important.



GRAPHICS BY SKETCHIFY VIA CANVA

Insight into Overcoming

by: Yanhong Huang

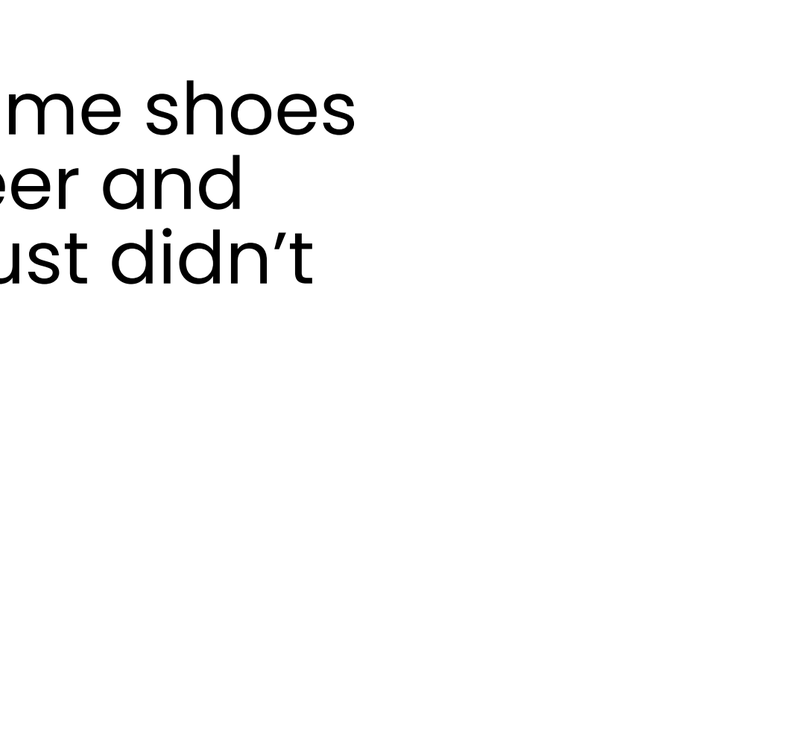
I interviewed current pre-medical student, **Justin Kao**, who came from a public school background and recalls struggling a lot more than other pre-med peers in his freshman fall. Here's what he had to say about his story.

What was the biggest challenge when you first started college?
After the first few weeks of school, there were people joining research labs, and I had never done any college-level research, and I had no idea I had to do research. It was super intimidating.

How did that make you feel?
There were a few who were in the same shoes as me, but a lot of them had volunteer and labs planned out. I guess I felt like I just didn't know where to start.

Did those feelings change over time?
At first I felt out of place, but later I was able to find a volunteer opportunity. It was not too late.

What advice would you give new pre-med students?
Don't worry about what people are doing; everyone starts from somewhere. Just ask questions, find mentors, and remember not everyone starts with the same opportunity.



GRAPHICS BY RUSMICON VIA CANVA

OUR REVIEWS OF THE PRE-MED EXPERIENCE

EVALUATE

Being a pre-med student allowed me to reevaluate my self-confidence. This experience happened recently, in the spring quarter of 2026. I had just taken an Ochem exam, and I felt like my world had ended. I kept telling my friends that it was "the worst exam I had ever taken". I was so sure that I failed, and that it would spiral into me failing the class and ruin any dreams I had of getting into medicine. I was completely defeated and saw no hope for my future. That exam ended up being the best score I had ever gotten in my Ochem career. I had to think hard about why I even felt so bad about it in the first place. Then, I remembered... I could answer every question; I knew what each problem was asking for and knew how to solve it. I was just egregiously unconfident. I was not confident in my capabilities to do well, so I ended up drowning in self-doubt. This caused me to realize that my efforts do pay off, and I should start believing in myself more in order for those efforts to thrive.

-Irene Cao

ON MY TIME

The Pre-med experience showed me that everyone works on their own time. In my previous college years, I realized the constant personal comparisons I made towards peers. I felt behind, not smart enough, in the wrong career, and other aspects that I believed I was not achieving. This overall began affecting my motivation to continue on the Pre-med track. I learned to accept my own pace and my own story. Even if it takes me a little more time, it is my personal Pre-med story.

-**Daisy Herrera**

PURPOSE

As a fourth year student who is about to start the medical school admissions process, there were definitely moments where I reconsidered if I even wanted to become a doctor. Those moments came from the countless nights of studying and many sacrificies I had to make. However, those exact moments are what have shaped me into the person I am now, and has given me the qualities I want to take with me in the process of becoming a physician.

- Miriam Rezkalla

BALANCE

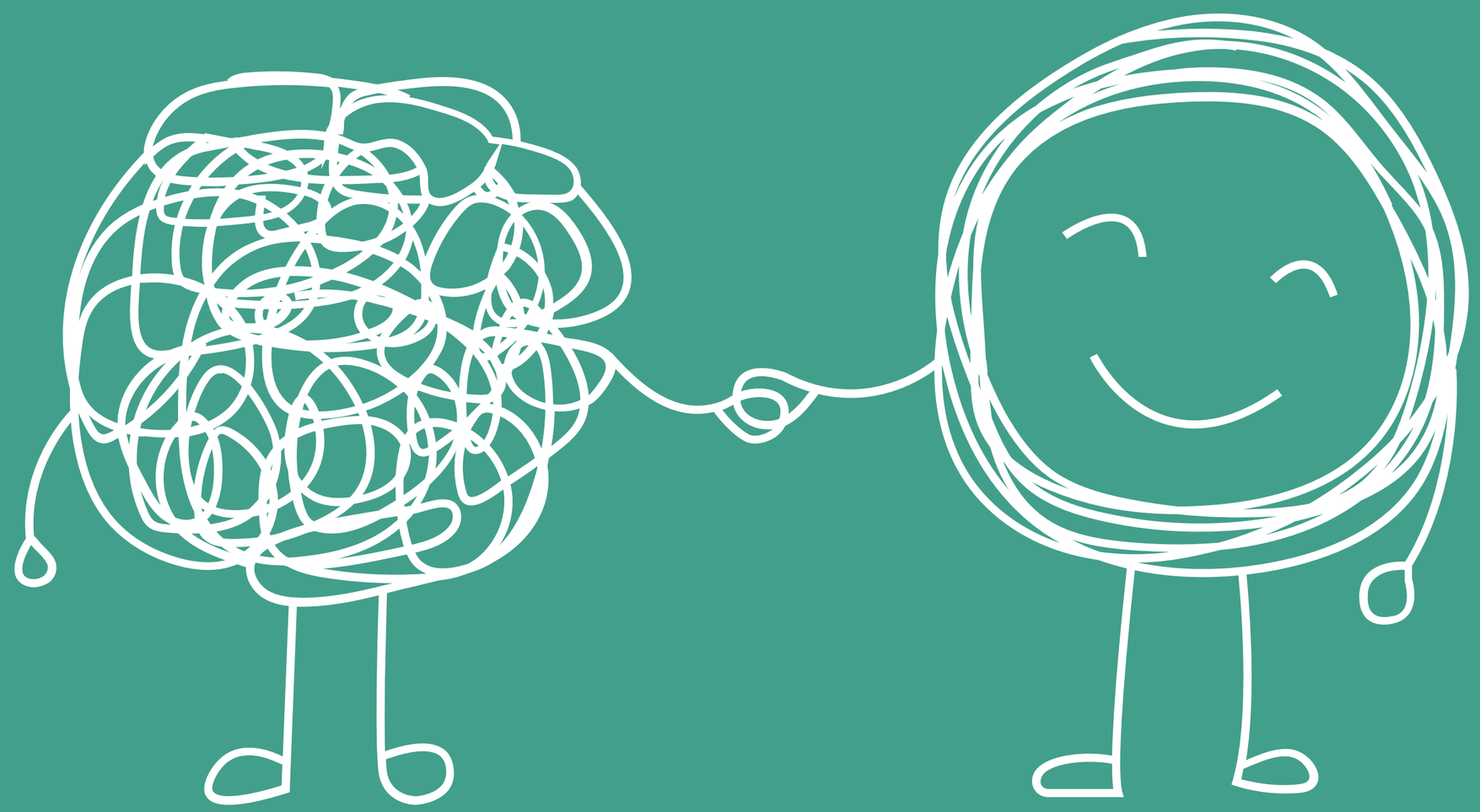
As a pre-med student, school alone can be a lot of work and stressful. If you decide to work, a good amount of your day is gone. One important experience in my life was learning how to balance school and work. I wanted to earn a little pocket money and help with some of my personal expenses, so I decided to get a part-time job while also going to school to pursue my education. At first, I thought it would be easy to manage both.

After a few weeks of school in the morning and work in the afternoon until 8pm, I realized that balancing work and school required a lot of planning. There were days when I felt tired after work but still had homework to finish before the 11:59pm. I had to organize my schedule carefully and stop wasting time. Even though it was stressful, I did not want to give up on both my education and pocket money.

This experience helped me become more responsible and independent of my time. Even though I still spent countless nights studying to pursue pre-med. I learned how to manage my time and complete my duties, while I keep working toward my goals. It also taught me that personal growth often comes from facing difficult situations.

-**Yanhong Huang**





GRAPHICS BY N VIA CANVA

What Comes Next?

By: Irene Cao

SOME MIGHT WONDER...

With all the stress that pre-medical students face, why do they choose to continue? This lies not only in having a strong passion, but also in having efficient, healthy ways to cope with the stress itself. That, and being aware of the available resources that can help guide students professionally that adapts to their circumstances.

However, resources could be hard to locate, and coping methods take time to find what works... So below includes:

Insight into what other pre-med students at UCR are doing to relieve their stress:

Each student was asked the question "How do you deal the stress of being a pre-medical student?"

Here's how they answered...

"Well, my stress usually comes from worrying about not doing enough... or not being a good candidate. I deal with it by talking to other pre-meds, and it shows me that everyone is taking different initiatives and has different strategies to get into medical school. It comforts me since I realize that there's no 'one right way' to do things and I can take my time to do things my own way"

– Adalee C.
UCR 3rd year
Biology

"I manage the stress by going out and just doing the things I love that aren't related to pre-med at all. Like I'll dedicate a day to nothing but my hobbies-- like tennis, camping, or spending time with friends. This lets me relax and reminds me that life is so much more than an acceptance letter."

– Wesley C.
UCR 3rd year
Biology

"For me, hitting a quick gym session and/or going out with friends helps with my stress big time. I feel like it's impossible to sit alone with yourself when you're stressed out; it just leads to feeling worse. So any activity that gets my mind off things before I have to study for the next biochem or ochem exam makes me feel so much better."

– Nicholas L.
UCR 3rd year
Biology

"I'll often stress about not performing as well as I wanted to in something... like, let's say I didn't get the grade I wanted. I'll talk to my loved ones, like my parents or my close friends, and they help comfort me. They show me that one bad grade isn't the end of the world, and that as long as I'm trying my best, I'm doing enough; and that's all that matters."

– Kevin L.
UCR 3rd year
Biology

3 Helpful resources that all UCR pre-meds should know about:

1

If you're having trouble in classes...
Consider the ARC (Academic Resource Center):

The ARC provides supportive services for undergraduates to help students maintain and build a strong GPA.

Check out **arc.ucr.edu** for more information!

2

If you need guidance on where to go next in your medical journey...
Consider PPAC (Pre-Professional Advising Center):

PPAC advises students to prepare them for their future careers through both professional staff and peer mentors.

Check out **ppac.ucr.edu** for more information!

3

If you need help finding extracurricular activities...
Consider the Highlander Link:

The Highlander Link is a website that keeps track of all the events and organizations at UCR

Check out **highlanderlink.ucr.edu** to get involved!

WHAT COMES NEXT

Everyone has different experiences and is struggling with different obstacles. Although at times, pursuing medicine may seem like an impossible task-- with the right mindset and the right support systems, the journey becomes more manageable, and goals are bound to be reached. Pre-med will never be easy, but in the end, it will be worthwhile to persevere through.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

BEHIND THE PRE-MEDICAL MIND

