

# FAQs: Mental and Physical Health Care During Medical School

Office of Physician and Student Wellness and Office of Graduate Medical Education

## Am I allowed to practice medicine if I have been treated for a mental health diagnosis or substance use disorder?

Yes. In one study, 27% of medical students have had depressive symptoms and 10-12% of physicians have a substance use disorder. With treatment, countless physicians have had long, productive, and satisfying careers.

## Am I required to report my mental and physical health diagnoses when applying for my medical license?

Physicians with mental and physical health diagnoses can obtain a medical license in every state, but the process for doing so varies between states. States differ in how they ask about current versus historical diagnoses. How they handle this information also differs from state to state, and is listed on the application. Concerns about getting a medical license should *never* keep you from seeking treatment for a mental or physical health diagnosis.

The New Mexico application asks: “Do you have or have you been diagnosed with an illness or condition which impairs your judgment or affects your ongoing ability to practice medicine in a competent ethical and professional manner?”

## How should I explain a leave of absence on my residency program application?

Talk with your medical school advisor about what should be said and what does not need to be said. Always plan to be honest in your answers, but know that you aren’t obligated to provide extensive details. For example, it may be enough to provide information such as “I was on a medical leave of absence for \_\_ months and returned to work with no restrictions.” Work with your advisor about how to prepare to answer questions about this on the application and in your interviews.

## What should I report on my job applications if I took time off from medical school?

There is not necessarily a requirement to disclose any time off, but it is common to be asked about gaps in training and employment. Always plan to be honest in your answers, but know that you aren’t obligated to provide extensive details including specific diagnoses. For example, it may be enough to provide information such as “I was on a medical leave of absence for \_\_ months and returned to work

with no restrictions.” You may wish to speak with your residency program director or another trusted faculty member about how best to answer this in person and on your applications when it comes up.

## What resources are available to me if I am feeling depressed or anxious?

There are many confidential resources available to you at UNM to support your mental health; using these resources will not be reported to the medical school or your training program:

- Jeff Dunn, MD, (UNM Psychiatrist) is available to see students: 505-272-6130 or [JeDunn@salud.unm.edu](mailto:JeDunn@salud.unm.edu)
- Cheri Koinis, PhD, (UNM Psychologist) is available to students: 505-272-3898 or [ckoinis@salud.unm.edu](mailto:ckoinis@salud.unm.edu)
- Agora Crisis Center is a phone hotline with walk-in counseling: <http://www.agoracares.org/> or 505-277-3013 or 866-HELP-1-NM
- Student Health And Counseling Center is available to see students: <https://shac.unm.edu> or 505-277-3136
- The *2019-2020 Psychotherapy and Counseling Guide* has many additional resources. It is available at: <http://campusclimate.unm.edu/resources/index.html>

## I used to have a substance use disorder/drinking problem/drug problem. Do I need to tell the medical school?

You’re not required to tell the medical school or your residency program about previous diagnoses, but you may wish to speak with your advisor or program director so that they can connect you with resources to help you find extra support to manage the stresses of medical school and residency.

## Do I need to report use of medical marijuana or other controlled substances to my medical school?

There is not yet a consensus in the medical community about how to manage students prescribed controlled substances, including medical marijuana, and some employers (including training programs) require negative results on drug testing at the time of hire and randomly throughout employment. Speak with your advisor about how to manage this, and with your prescribing clinician about other evidence-based treatments that may be available to you. More information on UNM School of Medicine policies is available here: <https://som.unm.edu/education/md/omsa/index.html>

## What mental health questions are asked on residency program applications?

There are no specific mental or physical health questions asked on ERAS residency or fellowship applications. The questions that *may* apply to mental or physical health diagnoses include:

- Was your medical education/training extended or interrupted? If yes, please provide details [blank box].
- Are you able to carry out the responsibilities of a resident or a fellow in the specialties and at the specific training programs to which you are applying, including the functional requirements,

cognitive requirements, interpersonal and communication requirements with or without reasonable accommodations? If no, please list your limiting aspect(s): [blank box].

## Do I need to tell the medical school or report on my residency program applications if I have been arrested?

You should notify your advisor if you've been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony. You should work with your advisor on how to best honestly these questions on your residency application:

- Have you ever been convicted of a misdemeanor in the United States? If yes, provide details [blank box]
- Have you ever been convicted of a felony in the United States? If yes, please explain [blank box]

## If I have to take sick leave during medical school, is the reason why kept private from my colleagues and supervising physicians?

Yes. If you have to take a prolonged amount of sick leave that will affect your ability to complete educational requirements on time, you should talk with your medical school advisor early to plan on how to minimize the effect on your education and clerkships.

## What should I do if I am sick and cannot work on a day I am supposed to see patients? Will it affect my grade?

If you cannot work due to being acutely sick and are scheduled to see patients, notify your supervising attending and resident immediately so they know you are okay and not to expect you that day. Students may have concerns this will affect their grade, but it will not if you follow the School of Medicine policy. Attendance policies are available in the *Student Handbook*.

## How can I take time off to see my doctor for routine care?

If you need to see your doctor for routine care, try to schedule this when you are not expected to be in didactics or taking care of patients. If the only times available are when you are expected in clinic or in the hospital, notify your resident, attending, and clerkship director so they can determine if make-up time is necessary. More information about taking time off is available in the *Student Handbook*.

## Is it normal to have thoughts of killing myself sometimes?

No. About 1 in 9 medical students will have thoughts of killing themselves during medical school. Even though thoughts of suicide may be common, they should always be taken seriously as a sign that you might be depressed, burnt out, or under too much stress. If you or a friend are having suicidal thoughts, please contact:

- Agora Crisis Line – available 24 hours a day and 7 days per week  
505-277-3013
- UNM Psychiatric Emergency Services - open 24 hours a day and 7 days per week  
505-272-2800
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline – available 24 hours a day and 7 days per week

## My work is starting to negatively affect my home life and my relationship with my family and friends are deteriorating. What resources are available to me?

Often times other people notice problems before we do, so pay attention to these signs and suggestions when this feedback is offered. There are many confidential UNM resources to support you and your mental health; using these resources will not be reported to the medical school:

- Jeff Dunn, MD, (UNM Psychiatrist) is available to see residents, fellows, and students: 505-272-6130 or [JeDunn@salud.unm.edu](mailto:JeDunn@salud.unm.edu)
- Agora Crisis Center: <http://www.agoracares.org/> or 505-277-3013 or 866-HELP-1-NM
- Cheri Koinis, PhD, (UNM Psychologist) is available to students: 505-272-3898 or [ckoinis@salud.unm.edu](mailto:ckoinis@salud.unm.edu)
- Student Health And Counseling Center is available to see students: <https://shac.unm.edu> or 505-277-3136
- Liz Lawrence, MD, (UNM Internist) is available to see residents, fellows, and students: [elawrence@salud.unm.edu](mailto:elawrence@salud.unm.edu)
- The attached *2019-2020 Psychotherapy and Counseling Guide* has many additional resources. It is also available at: <http://campusclimate.unm.edu/resources/index.html>

## What should I do if I am abused or harassed during my schooling or training?

Sometimes people do not behave professionally in a professional environment. If you are abused or harassed during your schooling, please contact Dr. Jonathan Bolton ([jwbolton@salud.unm.edu](mailto:jwbolton@salud.unm.edu)), Dr. Liz Lawrence ([elawrence@salud.unm.edu](mailto:elawrence@salud.unm.edu)), or your Learning Communities mentor. You may also speak with Dr. Sheila Hickey ([SHickey@salud.unm.edu](mailto:SHickey@salud.unm.edu)), Dr. Teresa Vigil ([TVigil@salud.unm.edu](mailto:TVigil@salud.unm.edu)) or any trusted faculty advisor. It is not your fault and you are not alone.

## I am concerned about my drinking or drug use. What resources are available to help me?

There are many confidential resources available to you at UNM to support you if you're concerned about substance use.

- Pamela Arenella, MD is a UNM Psychiatrist with additional board certification in Addiction Medicine, and is available to meet with students, residents, and fellows: [parenella@salud.unm.edu](mailto:parenella@salud.unm.edu)
- Jeff Dunn, MD, (UNM Psychiatrist) is available to see residents, fellows, and students: 505-272-6130 or [JeDunn@salud.unm.edu](mailto:JeDunn@salud.unm.edu)
- Cheri Koinis, PhD, (UNM Psychologist) is available to students: 505-272-3898 or [ckoinis@salud.unm.edu](mailto:ckoinis@salud.unm.edu)

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