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Psychological impacts of COVID-19 on healthcare trainees and perceptions towards a digital wellbeing support package

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Abstract: We explore the impact of COVID-19 on the psychological wellbeing of healthcare trainees, and the perceived value of a digital support package to mitigate the psychological impacts of the pandemic. This mixed-methods study includes i) exposure to a digital support package; ii) participant survey to assess wellbeing, perceptions of work and intervention fidelity; iii) semi-structured interviews. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, data were handled and analysed using thematic framework analysis. Participants are 42 health and medical trainees (9M, 33F) from 13 higher education institutions in the UK, studying during the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey findings showed high satisfaction with healthcare training (92.8%), but low wellbeing (61.9%), moderate to high perceived stressfulness of training (83.3%), and high presenteeism (50%). Qualitative interviews generated 3 over-arching themes, and 11 sub-themes. The pandemic has impacted negatively on emotional wellbeing of trainees, yet mental health is not well promoted in some disciplines, and provision of pastoral support is variable. Disruption to academic studies and placements has reduced perceived preparedness for future clinical practice. Regular check-ins, and wellbeing interventions will be essential to support the next generation health and care workforce, both in higher education and clinical settings. The digital support package was perceived to be accessible, comprehensive, and relevant to healthcare trainees, with high intervention fidelity. It is a useful tool to augment longer-term provision of psychological support for healthcare students, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.