Challenges Faced by International Students in Utilizing Student Health Center

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Background: International students are confronted with many challenges in relation to adjustments - personal, social, academic, language, psychological, coping, diet, discrimination, and new friendship as they embark on their journey to new foreign countries. Purpose: To determine the present challenges and concerns encountered by international students while utilizing the student health/and wellness center at a midwestern rural university. Methods: Qualitative, semi-structured interview was conducted among international students that represented four continents. Several areas of concerns: mental health and access to care, academic adjustment, general life adjustment, and social-cultural stressors were incorporated in the questionnaire. Our sample included 28 international graduate students, 22 male and 7 female ages 28-34 years. Results: Most commonly identified challenges were loneliness, money, general stress, and stress from school followed by cultural differences and food. The majority of the international students indicated having knowledge of student health center (SHC), and reported utilizing the services provided by the SHC. Only few participants reported of not knowing the center; therefore, not utilizing the services. Out of several barriers to use SHC, cost of care was most frequently mentioned by the participants followed by difficulty in understanding the system. Some service needs were also identified. Conclusion: Despite all the challenges and concerns, the international students continued utilizing the student health/wellness center for services. It was recommended improved friendliness of SHC staff, provision of translator and offer of same-sex provider at the time of appointment, and dissemination of health information at prime locations around campus where international students congregates.