Megan Pohl - University of Alberta

Project: *Recognizing and managing youth mental health: addressing a consumer-identified health priority through knowledge synthesis and translation*

Biography

Megan is a first year Master´s student in the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Alberta where she obtained her Bachelor of Science in Psychology last Spring.

Her passion for children and youth stems from her experience working with children in her community as a swimming instructor. Supporting the success of families in this context has given her a passion for improving the health outcomes of sick children. In her undergraduate degree, Megan explored how this passion could be channeled into research through her experiences researching autism and neurodevelopmental disorders. Over the last three years she has come to see research as a mechanism to indirectly improve the health outcomes of the children she works with in swimming lessons.

Megan aims to give back to her community through her research. She is specifically interested in youth anxiety and pursuing research topics that can provide benefit to the children in her community and within Alberta. Ultimately, her motivation for pursuing advanced health research training comes from a desire to improve the health outcomes in sick children through a career in pediatric research.

In her spare time, Megan loves long distance running, volunteering at McTaggart Retirement home by playing piano and singing for the residents, and painting. She looks forward to developing her patient-engagement skills through the Alberta SPOR Graduate Studentship.

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Project Summary

A priority setting project has been conducted by Megan's research group to identify a priority health question of Albertan youths: how can youth identify signs and symptoms of anxiety, and when to seek help? Megan has been involved in an environmental scan to map the existing evidence in this area. Subsequently Megan will be involved in a consultation with youth to generate their thoughts and feedback on the resources identified and determine next directions of this project. Informed by the environmental scan, Megan's master's thesis will include a qualitative study to understand how youth seek mental health information online during COVID-19 (e.g. Where do youth look for mental health information? What do youth appraise as helpful/trustworthy?). This will build the foundation for a knowledge translation (KT) strategy for youth. While patient involvement is widely advocated, in adolescent health research this usually refers to "parents" and little research has been done on the acceptability and feasibility of including youth.

Megan plans to engage 2-3 youth as partners and collaborators on her project to develop the structure of the interviews, the questions, recruitment strategies, data analysis, and dissemination of findings. This research project presents a novel contribution to the field of patient-oriented research and addresses a critically important and common health issue: of youth that search for mental health information online, only 52% report that they find the information that they want. By including youth perspectives throughout, it is expected that KT efforts will prove more meaningful with potential for greater impact on health outcomes.