

## **TESTIMONIAL 1**

I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety before coming into medical school. I went into my first year with the intent of maintaining weekly skype sessions with my therapist, but as school became more and more demanding, I stopped. As one would expect, my depression and anxiety caught up with me resulting in a breaking point at the end of my first year.

The breaking point led me to fail a module, but it also let me to the Student Counseling Center. I'm not sure if I would still be in medical school today if it were not for the SCC, and I've been there almost weekly since. With the help of the SCC staff, mental health became a top priority for me again. For someone like me who needs to stay on top of their mental health care, the SCC takes away the stress of financing my care or having to stress about the travel time that could take away from my studying during a particularly stressful week. And even beyond that, the SCC has become a safe space for me. To have a space in my life where I can enter feeling completely unjudged and safe and supported has been so crucial to my success.

Looking back, I think something inside of me did not want to go to the counseling center because I thought depression and a career as a physician were mutually exclusive. However, with the treatment I have been able to receive at the SCC, I realize that my depression is not an indication that I will be mentally and emotionally unfit to practice medicine.

## **TESTIMONIAL 2**

The Student Counseling Center (SCC) here at UT Health San Antonio provides a place for stability, support, and treatment during some of the hardest times in our lives. Taking on the task of graduate school alone is difficult, whether it is medical, dental, nursing or any other program, and the pressure felt by most students to fulfill these roles perfectly in society can be damaging alone. Throw family, relationship, financial, mental illness and many other issues into the mix and you can quickly see how a student could begin to feel as if they were drowning in all of it.

This is where the SCC steps in. They are a buoy, per se, in the sea of overwhelming anxiety, stress, and difficult tasks that do not go away just because you decided to attend a graduate school. Most of us are here because we want to learn how to care for others, and in the process, many of us damage our own health by trying to live up to our idealistic goals. The SCC has been a place that helps me unpack a little bit of my stress with each visit, a place where I can let someone else help me carry my burdens for a while. If I did not have the SCC, I honestly do not know where my mental state would be at currently because of what I have been through.

In my first 6 months of medical school alone, I had to deal with the death of a very close family member, the loss of any sort of stability or emotional support within my family, and have had to take on the task of caring for my younger sister because she is not being provided for at home. This is a lot to deal with on top of trying to stay focused in school and achieve my own personal goals. The SCC has helped me immensely in the past 6 months, and I am so thankful to have them walk with me through the hard times when no one else is there to do so.

It is important that we continue to ensure the SCC is available and can accommodate all students that are seeking help. As it is currently, waiting times to see a counselor can be up to a week and to see the psychiatrist can take months. I think that the SCC is fundamental to many students' success, and we should have the ability and capacity to take care of our own before we can learn to take care of others.

### **TESTIMONIAL 3**

I don't want to sound trite or clichéd about how the SCC has helped me over the past four years, but words feel inadequate. Stress from my relationship, work, and a recent cross-country move wore me down emotionally in a way I had never experienced, and did not know how to manage. But they were there.

With the help of psychologists at the SCC I learned positive coping strategies and found the personal fortitude to take some really difficult, but positive, steps toward change in my life. Even though my circumstances have changed, and I am in a much better place emotionally, I still go because I'm still learning to develop and grow, and identifying weaknesses that I still need help addressing.

Being limited in time and money, I would not have been able to go anywhere else. I don't really want to think about where I would be without their support and guidance. I am a stronger person because of them, and I think that every student deserves the same opportunity and potential for growth.

### **TESTIMONIAL 4**

Depression is something that I never thought would affect me. However, being a medical student is stressful, as we are in an environment where it seems like everything is expected of us all the time. This can easily affect mental health, and this is what happened to me.

Last summer, I was exhausted and burned out from almost a year of nonstop studying. I was already on a medication for anxiety and mild depression, but it quickly became apparent that it was not enough. With the school psychiatrist's help, I tried medication after medication while spiraling further and further down each passing day. During this period, I was also receiving help from one of the school's therapists, with the hope that I would start to feel better. This went on for months. By the end, I was on medication for studying, sleeping, and my overall wellbeing. I was seeing the psychiatrist every 2 weeks, but nothing seemed to be working. However, without these visits, I don't know what I would have done.

At this point, we have finally found something that worked, and I am so appreciative of all the help I received. Without the Student Counseling Center, I'm not sure I would still be here. When things got to the point where it seemed like there was no way out, the Counseling Center was there for me.

Medical school is difficult enough as it is, and I can't imagine not having an accessible place to seek help. Thankfully, here at UT-Health San Antonio, there is a place where help is available.

Any chance to expand this necessary resource is worth the time, money and energy. I know the students here would be forever grateful.

#### **TESTIMONIAL 5**

The Student Counseling Center has become one of my most used resources at UT Health. For me, it has served as a safe haven where I can share my struggles without worrying about being judged or somehow reprimanded. I am sincerely thankful to the counselors and psychiatrist for all the guidance they have given me. I truly believe my academic performance and, more importantly, my mental health have improved because of it.

#### **TESTIMONIAL 6**

The Student Counseling Center at UT Health San Antonio is a safe and comfortable environment for me to go to and openly express my academic and personal concerns. The therapists, scheduler and staff at the counseling center have been kind, approachable, friendly and trustworthy.

For the past several years, I have utilized the counseling center for a variety of reasons including bullying by a clinical faculty member, managing stress as well as personal problems. These matters are not easy to speak about, and at times, it is difficult to find someone who would understand and keep the information confidential.

The therapists at the counseling center have been exceptional in taking the time to listen to my concerns, and give me valuable advice on how to deal with the issues, as well as refer me to the appropriate people who could help me resolve the issues. And more importantly they keep the information confidential.

The issues I experienced affected my emotional functioning and hindered my academic success. Without the help of the counseling center, it would have been very stressful and difficult to get through the challenging educational curriculum. There were even times when my counselor would skip lunch just to be able to meet with me and help me cope with the pressures associated with a challenging academic environment.

The counseling center has provided me with a confidential, safe, and supportive environment during my academic career and has contributed tremendously to my academic and personal success.

#### **TESTIMONIAL 7**

Beginning medical school is an exciting yet terrifying time in one's life. I was filled with joy for the journey to come but was also nervous about the unknown pressures and time constraints that would soon consume my life. For that reason, I promised myself that I would put myself first, no longer sacrificing my overall happiness for my future achievements. Shortly after my arrival, I truly came to understand that overused phrase everyone had repeated to me in the time leading

up to the start of school - "it's like trying to take a drink from a fire hydrant". I have found no other expression to adequately describe what that first 6 months felt like.

During that time, matters at home worsened as a family member's battle with addiction teetered. While I woke up every day elated to be where I was, I felt some of my joy slipping away. Unresolved emotions surrounding years of life with an addict came to the forefront and I realized that I needed to do something to take care of me or else I would come out the other side of my training, a part of the portion of doctors who say they would not go back and do it again.

I first reached out for help to the Student Counseling Center after the holiday break. I was nervous and flustered in my first appointment - fumbling over my words, randomly bursting into tears. Yet there sat my confidant, composed as ever, waiting patiently to hear everything I had to say. As weeks turned into months, I was able to work through the things I knew I needed help with as well as those that I was unaware were causing so much strife in my life. Every appointment was time to work on a complicated puzzle – together we would pour me out, sort me out, and then put me back together. I could do this because I felt safe. I gave the counseling center my full trust in confidentiality and they have handled it with such care.

Asking for help is sometimes the hardest thing you can do - it was one of the hardest things I have ever done. When given the option, I would go back and do medical school one thousand times again because it brought me to therapy and therapy brought me to a place of peace with my past, my future, and myself.

## **TESTIMONIAL 8**

People have wondered why I encourage my peers who are struggling with life, school, and personal issues to go to the Student Counseling Center. It's simple really, because their services are needed, helpful, and sometimes even lifesaving. No I am not exaggerating on these points.

University is hard in its self, now add life problems and somedays it is unbearable. How do we keep our heads a float when we don't have the support system we need? How do we keep from sinking under the weight and the pressure? The answer is simple, Student Counseling Center.

I've been going and seeking the counseling services at the SCC for several months now, and it truly has helped me manage the stress of school and my personal situation. Instead of feeling like giving up and leaving the dream I had behind, they've made it manageable for me. SCC has been available for me through one of the hardest times of my life. It was easy to get an appointment and I was greeted by a very supportive staff. It was one of the first times in my life that I didn't feel judged at a counseling center. I was met with an overwhelming genuine concern about my life and what I was struggling with. The SCC didn't just hear my problems and send me on my way. They've been there every step to help me along my journey of healing.

## **TESTIMONIAL 9**

Medical school is as fickle and perilous an experience as it is rewarding. An adventure composed of protracted periods of studying interspersed with exceedingly ephemeral periods of rest. This can create an environment which facilitates mounting levels of stress, but provides often too little respite to dissipate it. This manifests as depression, anxiety, and the classic “Imposter Syndrome”.

I know this because during my 1<sup>st</sup> two years, I have felt all three of these things more times than I can count, and each time the Student Counseling Center has not only helped me through them, but provided the tools and guidance to help me develop positive strategies that I can implement on my own in the future. I can honestly say that I would not have done as well, either mentally, emotionally, or academically without the help of every person who works there and I honestly believe them to be as vital to a healthy medical school experience as lectures and labs (and for some of my friends, Starbucks).

I leave you with this thought. Every study to date has concluded that medical students are at much higher risk for depression and suicide compared to the general population and this trend only gets worse as the students become residents and physicians. With the help of the Student Counseling Center, I now feel confident that I can deal with anything that comes during residency and beyond, and this feeling is an invaluable gift that the Student Counseling Center has helped me achieve. Let them help others do the same.

## **TESTIMONIAL 10**

As a professional students attending UTHSCSA I had to face a variety of challenges in both my personal and student life. I sought services from the counseling center for stress and anxiety and was helped with coping strategies. I also reached out for guidance regarding relationship issues.

I could not have been able to succeed in my studies without the help of the counselors. Neither could I have afforded this type of help outside. The counselors and employees are very kind and go above and beyond to help. There were many times when I called for an appointment for immediate help and I was told to stop by. The counselors would always return my phone call right away and move their lunch hour around to accommodate my schedule. On some occasions they reached out to the school faculty and help to resolve school issues.

I know of many other students who had to be medicated with anti-anxiety and anti-depression medication to get through the semester. There were also several students who were suicidal and I encouraged them to seek help at the counseling center and were helped appropriately. Many students have the same schedule as their classmates in both medical and dental school and are only able to seek help 3 to 4 hours a week on specific days and times, but the number of counselors available during those times are limited and has been a reason for students to be discouraged from either obtaining a refill for their medication or seeking help. I support the hiring of more therapists and counselors to help and accommodate student’s needs.

It is my understanding that many students are not aware of the services that are provided through the counseling center. Therefore, I support the school and taking additional steps to explain the services provided by the counseling center to students.

Unfortunately many students think therapy is taboo or only for those who are mentally ill and clarifying this misconception can also encourage more students to get the help they need. Explaining to students one-on-one on how the services can help with personal issues anxiety and depression and how the counselors are nonbiased nonjudgmental and the information is confidential will also encourage more students to seek the help they need.

### **TESTIMONIAL 11**

“I, like many students, am prone to introspection, which is helpful for the self-effacing individual concerned with existential angst but can become, and which in my case did become, a source of destabilization that magnified the feeling of melancholia. While I trusted the SCC in blind faith with my well-being, now I trust the SCC from experience. I would not be the person I am today without that first initial awkward walk into my counselor’s office; it is one of the best decisions in life that I have made. The SCC is a rock which grounds me in the present and a neutral mirror that reflects my thoughts back to me to question and improve upon my vulnerable self. The world becomes not quite as lonely and dark, and in fact so much brighter.”

### **TESTIMONIAL 12**

I feel both fortunate and grateful that the SCC exists. As a student, I have so little time and energy that being able to get help close to where I live and work really makes the difference. I've had providers outside of school and in comparison, I get appointments at the SCC much sooner and also find the SCC to be more knowledgeable and more prepared to advise me immediately on my professional concerns.

In my time here, I've been shocked to find out how many of my classmates also use the SCC. While I can't speak for them, I can tell you that going has really helped me. When you're struggling, it's hard to seek help. It's hard to admit you need it, hard to know where to start, hard to do even simple things to help yourself. You get so used to feeling hopeless, tired, defeated, that you forget that it's possible to feel differently. I remember how shocked I was that things actually got better after seeking treatment. It made a difference in my mood, my relationships, my grades, my performance, my energy, my sleep.

To other students, I guess I'd say that you never know. You don't expect to be the one that needs help, but then your parent gets sick, you have an expensive car accident, you have a class that crushes you, you have a breakup. It made such a difference in my life to have the SCC be available when I needed it. I just want other people to continue to have these resources should they need it too.