

Outreach in Omicron: A BHSC Outreach/External Case Competition 2022



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Abstract

This “Outreach in Omicron” case competition, hosted by the BHSc Outreach and BHSS External committees at McMaster University, originated as an initiative to spark leadership and engagement by challenging students to develop an idea for a novel volunteer program within the Hamilton community. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the return to a “new normal” in community programs, this type of thinking is crucial to provide necessary support to the many organizations within Hamilton that are supported by BHSc Outreach and the McMaster community. The following abstracts are representative of three proposals submitted for consideration for an opportunity to integrate one of them with a BHSc Outreach program during the upcoming year through this case competition. In doing so, this competition was intended to foster a positive, community-oriented mindset among McMaster students by providing an opportunity to directly contribute to the local Hamilton community.

Keywords: outreach; COVID-19; Hamilton; community

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Conference Abstracts

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Artistic alleviation of mental agony amidst the pandemic

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The novel coronavirus pandemic has caused Canadian youth to experience an increase in symptoms of mental health disorders. These include risk factors for anxiety, stress, and depression. Students enrolled in postsecondary education are particularly vulnerable, with ¾ of mental health patients in Canada being first diagnosed when they are in or just out of post-secondary education (ages 16 to 24). Isolation, and thus a lack of human connection during the pandemic, has only exacerbated these numbers. A promising therapeutic for these symptoms is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). However, with average fees of \$200 CAD per session, CBT is inaccessible for many post-secondary students. One avenue for bridging this gap is through the help of holistic art activities. These activities not only aid the individual at hand but have the opportunity to bridge the broader community as well. Participating in creative endeavors such as painting, drawing, and sculpting shows potential to mitigate risk factors for psychological distress. A review of the connection between art, healing, and public health has found that engagement in creative activity improves physiological and psychological well-being. More specifically, working with one's hands is found to be therapeutic and intellectually stimulating, as it forges new neural pathways. To take advantage of the holistic benefits of creative activities, a pottery event will be organized at the McMaster Campus Student Centre. This event will connect art, healing, and public health, by bridging individuals in the McMaster and Greater Hamilton communities. The Student Centre is easily accessible for students and faculty and will provide a place for

individuals to connect with both their artistic side and each other. The Hamilton clay bar "Play with Clay" will be consulted for providing potter's wheels and sculpting materials. To encourage student participation, tentatively, the first 30 individuals will experience the activity for free on a first-come-first-serve basis. Upon discourse with the organization, our goal is for other students to receive a discount of approximately \$6 per sculpture. Negotiations with "Play with Clay" will be used to determine the exact fees and number of participants that will be accommodated during the event. The company's incentive will be publicity and improvement of holistic, communal, and public health within the community. The intended results of this initiative include the promotion of individual and public health while fostering a connection between art and healing. The pandemic exacerbates the stress, anxiety, and academic pressures students face in their university careers. The opportunity to engage in holistic art activities will allow students to "reset" and encourage their participation in non-academic activities. This intervention will not only benefit the individual participating but will also allow them to give back to the community by creating decoration pieces for friends, figurines for The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton, or mugs for the Senior Care Services at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton - connecting the community after a long period of isolation. Students will have an option to deliver sculptures themselves with a personalized letter, thus fostering meaningful connections in the community.

Student-led pro-bono healthcare consulting: A research study

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The pandemic has presented challenges for many groups within the community, including local businesses and students. Due to economic uncertainty, many businesses have been forced to reassess spending priorities leading to a host of resultant consequences, such as decreased marketing budgets and smaller team sizes due to layoffs. In particular, small businesses within the healthcare sector have been identified as "highly affected" by the pandemic. Simultaneously, many students with an interest in gaining real-world industry experience continue to face great difficulty in finding experiential learning opportunities like internships and jobs. To encourage synergistic partnerships between students and small businesses within the Hamilton community, I propose the establishment of McMaster University's first and only pro-bono healthcare consulting organization. Inspired by existing organizations at other universities, such as Cornell University's Cayuga Healthcare Consulting (Ithaca, NY), McMaster University's organization will pair a team of student business analysts with a healthcare small business client for approximately a semester of pro-bono work. At the beginning of the semester, potential clients will be contacted to gauge interest and student analyst groups will be formed. Once clients and analyst groups have been finalized, students will regularly meet with clients to understand the industry landscape and specific problems currently facing clients. From here, students will be tasked with providing deliverables as needed by clients, which may include bi-semesterly market research presentations, proposals for low-cost grassroots marketing strategies, and internal assessments of the company itself like SWOT analyses. Throughout each project, students will enhance their appreciation for and understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of healthcare. The tenets of this pro-bono organization especially align with McMaster University's own leadership in healthcare innovation. The university recently received a \$32M investment for endeavours in healthcare innovation, such as the development of The Clinic healthcare entrepreneurship hub. McMaster University is also home to a unique student population including hundreds of students pursuing primary studies in science (Health Sciences, Life Sciences, Integrated Sciences, etc.) with elective coursework or minors in business disciplines. Many such students aspire to integrate both these interests in a future career path. The creation of this pro-bono healthcare consulting organization has the potential to provide students with professionally relevant experiential learning opportunities grounded in acts of community service in support of local healthcare-focused businesses.

TelAccessible: Bridging the health care gap

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The COVID-19 pandemic and resultant lockdowns have exacerbated health disparities, especially in terms of access to and quality of healthcare, along with overall health outcomes. Individuals from marginalised communities, such as the homeless, tend to have a greater number of coexisting non-communicable diseases which increase their susceptibility to COVID-19. When combined with the congregate living setting of homeless shelters, a perfect breeding ground is created for the rapid transmission of COVID-19. With the pandemic forcing healthcare systems to adopt virtual methods of care delivery to avoid the risk of virus transmission, people experiencing homelessness have found it especially difficult to connect with healthcare services due to a lack of consistent phone or internet access. According to a 2020 census, Hamilton's poverty rate is 16.7%,

which is well above the national average of 12.8%. Homelessness is a rising problem in Hamilton with many citing the COVID-19 pandemic and health issues as key barriers preventing them from obtaining work and housing. In light of this information, our team decided to create TelAccessible—a community-based service connecting those experiencing homelessness with a primary healthcare provider. Our service will collaborate with places frequently used by homeless individuals including shelters, day centres, soup kitchens, and addiction facilities, to provide the technology required to access virtual care, such as tablets, computers, and high bandwidth network. Kiosks would be supplied to the above facilities to ensure privacy while discussing their health concerns with the medical professional. Furthermore, we would provide workshops and instructional manuals teaching homeless individuals how to use the telemedicine platform. Overall, providing telemedicine to the homeless population in Hamilton would allow for easier access to care by removing barriers like transportation and lack of technology; thus, helping to close the healthcare gap.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest.

Authors' Contributions

AA: Founded the first BHSc Outreach case competition held in 2021, developed promotional materials and scoring materials, as well as drafting the conference abstract booklet, and gave final approval of the version to be published.

VK: Involved in developing and distributing promotional materials for the competition.

NL: Served as one of the judges for the competition, also involved in developing and distributing promotional materials for the competition.

ET: Involved in developing and distributing promotional materials for the competition.

WL: Served as one of the judges for the competition, also involved in developing and distributing promotional materials for the competition.

AG: Served as one of the judges for the competition, also involved in developing and distributing promotional materials for the competition.

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