Increased Mental Health Literacy Results in Resiliency

**Background**
We at Healthy U Cowichan, in collaboration with the community, strive to recognize and meet the needs of the population in order to promote health and enhance wellbeing. We are working with an interdisciplinary team and provide health promotion services such as Bell “Let’s Talk”, Biometric clinics, and Sexual Health teaching. We have a special connection with this community as we are all former students of the VIU Cowichan campus and we gratefully acknowledge our practice takes place on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people.

**Why is this a Significant Nursing Issue?**
Stress, anxiety and depression are on the rise in university students. Lack of awareness, misinformation and stigma associated with mental health leads to underutilization of mental health services. It is a nurse’s role to advocate for interventions to increase resiliency in our community of practice.

**Methodology**
The critical paradigm informs our research. We believe a mixed method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods, will facilitate our research using surveys and focus groups. The Adaptation Model by Sister Callista Roy provides insight into the connection between biological, psychological, and social aspects of an individual’s life. This holistic framework allows nurses and clients to collaborate and adequately cope with life stressors to maintain balance.

**Our Questions**
1. Does increased mental health literacy enhance resiliency in university students?
2. Would mandatory counseling sessions throughout their education be beneficial for university students in recognizing their own mental health status?
3. What do university students believe are the benefits of improving their mental health literacy?

**Literature Review**
Despite research proving university students’ mental health is an area of concern, depression, anxiety, and suicide rates are on the rise (De Somma, Jaworska, Heck, & MacQueen, 2017). Rickwood’s (2012) framework posits four stages of help-seeking: awareness and appraisal, expression of need, knowledge of resources, and willingness to accept help. Knowing what the stressors are and understanding their repercussions aid in identifying the cause of the mental health crisis and why mental health resources are underutilized (Orsini, Evans, & Jerez, 2015). Robinson, Jubenville, Renny, & Cairns (2016), found that “students who died by suicide had never reached out for support from their university counseling center” (p. 110). Cognitive behavioral therapy, as well as mindfulness therapy, have proven to be effective interventions for decreasing anxiety and depression (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2012). It is beneficial to aid students in managing their stress rather than working towards reducing the stressors themselves (Sawatzky, Ratner, Richardson, Washburn, Sudmant, & Mirvaldt, 2012). It is suggested that nurses advocate for interventions that help students manage their stress (Sawatzky, et al., 2012).

**Discussion**
As posited, there is a mental health crisis affecting the lives of university students. Barriers to access include lack of awareness and stigma. Students are not seeking the help they need. When students are away from their support network and family, have a lack of knowledge about mental health, are unsure of when or where to seek help, do not understand treatments, and are fearful of being stigmatized, improved mental health literacy could enhance students’ capability for self-efficacy. We believe increased mental health literacy will prompt help-seeking behaviors and dismantle barriers. By increasing mental health literacy we expect an increase in resiliency within university students.