

LETTER TO EDITOR

Smartphone addiction among medical students: a silent behavioral epidemic

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To the Editor,

Smartphones have become integral to medical education; however, their excessive use is increasingly being recognized as problematic. Medical students, who are exposed to sustained academic stress and continuous digital engagement, may be particularly vulnerable to maladaptive patterns of use. Problematic smartphone use is now conceptualized as a behavioral addiction, characterized by impaired control, excessive engagement, and continued use despite adverse consequences (1). In this population, such patterns may adversely affect both mental health and academic functioning.

Recent studies have demonstrated associations between excessive smartphone use and poor sleep quality, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced academic performance (1, 2). Night-time usage, prolonged screen exposure, and frequent engagement with social media contribute to circadian disruption and cognitive fatigue, which can significantly impair learning efficiency (2). In academic settings, students often report compulsive checking behaviors, difficulty limiting screen time, and reduced concentration during study periods. These behaviors are frequently normalized and may go unrecognized until they result in significant impairment (3).

Emerging neurobiological evidence suggests involvement of reward-related dopaminergic pathways, indicating similarities with other behavioral addictions (4). Such mechanisms may reinforce habitual use and perpetuate a cycle that is difficult to interrupt without structured intervention. Despite growing recognition of this issue, systematic institutional responses remain limited. There is a need to incorporate digital well-being into medical curricula, introduce routine screening within student health services, and promote norms that encourage balanced technology use.

Practical strategies, including scheduled device-free periods, reinforcement of sleep hygiene, and mindfulness-based approaches, may serve as feasible initial interventions. In conclusion, problematic smartphone use among medical students is an under-recognized but clinically relevant concern that warrants both individual-level and institutional-level attention to safeguard mental health and academic performance (5).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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