Background
Burnout is a growing epidemic that affects the vast spectrum of healthcare students with mental health and can lead to academic under-performance, decreased empathy, burnout, and suicidal ideation. Unfortunately, conversations around mental health still carry the burden of stigma and students are less likely to seek assistance\(^1\,\,2\). The Stress Fest, a week-long program for health science students, was created with aims to normalize stigmas associated with mental health and burnout - to provide a central hub for students to easily access healthy ways to reduce stress and balance their body and mind. Each day of the week catered to an aspect of mental well-being, for example, Mindfulness trainings, Anti-Stigma panels, Meditation Sessions, Sunset Yoga, and a Resource Fair created with aims to normalize stigmas associated with mental health and can lead to academic under-performance, decreased empathy, burnout, and suicidal ideation. Since the PSS is a validated stress scale, incorporating it in future sessions could help students recognize how elements of depression and anxiety correlate with their perceived stress\(^4\). The Stress Fest offers a safe place for students to recognize their stress and its correlations to depression and anxiety more importantly, it provides an avenue where students can learn healthy practices to mitigate their stress.

Methods
Participants voluntarily reported their level of stress on a LIKERT scale from 1-5. A pre-survey was administered at the beginning of each event. It assessed Q.3 from the Perceived Stress Scale\(^10\): In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed? A 5-question post-survey followed at the conclusion of each event. It also assessed Q.3; in addition to other variables (see Survey content). Differences in stress levels based on students’ program of study were compared.

Statistics
Descriptive statistics were calculated using EXCEL (v.16.13) to assess the level of perceived stress. Moderate and high levels of perceived stress were defined as level 4 and 5 respectively. EXCEL (v.16.13) was also used to define the overall level of perceived stress in the attendant population. Differences in pre, post, and overall level of stress on the day of the event were calculated in MEDCALC with Chi-square tested using N-1.

Survey Content
Two surveys were specifically designed with extrapolations from the PSS\(^10\). Both anonymous (unlinked) surveys were administered on the day of attendance and assessed stress levels on a LIKERT scale ranging from most stressed (5) to not stressed(1).

The sign-in survey also inquired about students’ email, program of study, and year of their program.

The second survey was administered at the end of each event. In addition to assessing stress levels, this survey included open-ended questions about interest in seeing the event replicated and suggestions for improvement. Students also identified where they heard about the event.

Results
Average Daily Percentage of Students Reporting High & Moderate Levels of Stress by Program

Pre-Post Participation
The difference between proportions of students rating themselves less stressed (i.e., not stressful (1,2,3) vs. stressful (4,5)) was compared based on ratings on the total pre-session and total post-session response to the question, “How stressed do you feel today?” The resulting difference between proportions were not significant (Chi-square = .068, p=.7942, CI = 10.2518, 12.8357). Interpretation: Changes in level of stress were not immediately apparent from the beginning to end of session. Possibly due to question focusing on ‘today’ rather than ‘right now.’

Conclusion
The Stress Fest provided an avenue for students to engage with methodologies and practices that could mitigate feelings of burnout and stress. Students stated feelings of gratitude and peace after their engagement at varying events. Examples of comments included: “offer a whole course on this,” “Thank you, ” and “This really helped me today.”

Participation of students from multiple health professions programs increased the normalizing nature of the event.

Reflections
There were variations in stress from day to day which suggests short term responses to school-specific stressors.

Since the PSS is a validated stress scale, incorporating it in future sessions could help students recognize how elements of depression and anxiety correlate with their perceived stress\(^4\). The Stress Fest offers a safe place for students to recognize their stress and its correlations to depression and anxiety more importantly, it provides an avenue where students can learn healthy practices to mitigate their stress.

Proposal
It is pertinent to begin addressing burnout in the realm of healthcare academia and to focus on all students who fall in the spectrum of healthcare. It is also essential to normalize the act of help-seeking behaviors in students.

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References

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Figure 1: Program Demographics

Figure 2: More than twice as many Medical, PA and Pharmacy students indicated high levels of stress than did those in other programs.