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# The ethics of health sciences academics intervening in students with suspected psychiatric illness in South Africa

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# THE ETHICS OF HEALTH SCIENCES ACADEMICS INTERVENING IN STUDENTS WITH SUSPECTED PSYCHIATRIC ILLNESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

Psychiatric illness has become a major topic of concern in the university setting. Therehave been numerous calls for academics to intervene and address the rise of psychiatric illness amongst the students. It is imperative that interventions are normatively analysed so as to ensure they are ethically justified. This research focuses on health science academics' role and how their roles and responsibilities are associated with the call to intervene when a student is suspected to have psychiatric illness. I will argue that it is ethically unjustifiable for health sciences academics to intervene when they suspect a student to have psychiatric illness. I argue that direct or indirect interventions take a paternalistic approach, which is ethically unjustifiable as the student is an autonomous individual capable of rational decision making. Secondly, interventions are not within the role and expected responsibilities of the health sciences academic.

I will explore the consequences that interventions may have on the student and healthsciences academic, and their relationship. I argue that the negative outcomes outweigh the positive outcomes which further support my argument that it is ethically unjustifiable for a health sciences academic to intervene when they suspect a studenthas psychiatric illness.

Finally, I propose that the academic still has a duty of care for the student and this dutyof care can assist the academic in supporting students with suspected psychiatric illness in an ethically justified manner.