

GSU Survival Guide

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TIPS AND ADVICE FROM THE GSU HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE

Most of the active membership of this subcommittee finished their PhDs, and this past year a new committee has been trying to find its feet. Most of our efforts have been focused on trying to understand, on the one hand, the changes after the Affordable Care Act, and simultaneously, gauge patient feedback. Our members work with the Student Health Advisory Board, and through it designed a survey which was sent out to a large sample among the student body. This helped us identify some key areas of concern: 1) costs were the biggest concern, along with concerns about costs not being communicated properly, 2) lack of information, especially regarding the insurance and what is covered, 3) some people said that they avoid the student health and counseling services because they expect to face, or have faced, racial or gendered prejudices, or have had to deal with practitioners who are not sensitive to cultural differences. Accordingly, we felt it would be good to revisit our 2013 document and expand it, should it in any way help fellow grad students find their feet in a difficult scenario. Please do write to us if you feel your experiences or knowledge can help us improve this document. Also, presently we are trying to organise against the sudden dramatic rise in our insurance deductibles. If you would like to be involved with that campaign, or wish to discuss anything else pertaining to health here at UofC, please get in touch with our healthcare committee (Abhishek: obhishekbolchi@gmail.com; Nicole: nikkimorse@gmail.com).

The university health insurance plan (U-SHIP), managed by United Healthcare Student Resources, is not as bad as it could be. It covers an okay range of services, at least relative to the high cost of health insurance generally. It is comparable with the best plans available on the Illinois marketplace, though that might not be saying much since the large and relatively young student body who get this plan should allow the university to bargain low prices. There remain significant issues with the plan, and the university could certainly purchase a better plan by paying more. For instance, other universities in the vicinity with recognised unions have much better plans. You could check out the University of Illinois, Chicago plan if you wish (<https://campuscare.uic.edu/files/2015/08/CampusCare-Certificate-of-Coverage-2016-FINAL.pdf>). This document you are reading is meant to be a brief introductory note to help make the system work for you. It is divided into the following sections: to help navigate the system, important locations, costs, dental/vision care.

To help navigate the system

- the insurance plan requires you to get your primary care from Student Health Services (SHS) (sometimes referred to as the Student Care Center). If you don't go there first to get a referral for health services, you may be penalized by the insurance plan. A part of your student life fee goes towards paying for the SHS, and services you subsequently avail there are usually without additional charges. However, it is good practice to always clarify these matters with reference to your particular condition when visiting. Also, since you depend on an SHS referral to avail of the benefits of the insurance, it

means that if you have delayed paying your student life fee you are in effect left without an insurance for the time being.

- if it is an urgent matter during out of office hours, it is strongly recommended that you contact the university's nurse advice line (773-702-1915) for a referral. If you encounter any disputes with the insurance company, such official referrals will be critical for you to defend yourself from paying the full bill. However, the university's nurse advice line is outsourced and run neither by the university nor by the insurance company. Possibly because of this reason, there have been cases of the nurse advice line not entering the referral correctly, making it difficult for the student to retrieve the information when needing it to later dispute that charge. Hence, record the time, duration, and the name of the nurse you talked to, and save the phone bill that shows your call record. (The phone bill may not be sufficient proof for the company though.) If not, make it a point to mention the fact that you have been referred at every juncture possible.
- you are not required to make a payment at the time that you visit a doctor. It is your legal right to refuse if asked. Your bills are generated after the visit, and it is only after they go through the claims process that you are expected to pay anything. Also, if you are being treated at the UCMC, you may qualify for "charity care" because almost all graduate students are low wage earners. The hospital uses this to tout its support for poor people, though as, a "Non Profit" it pays no income or property taxes and in exchange is legally required to provide a certain amount of subsidized care.
- the process for applying for charity care is relatively simple. Go to the following webpage: <http://www.uchospitals.edu/billing/financial-assistance.html>. You will find a .pdf of the financial assistance form. Fill out the form. Under the employer, list the University of Chicago. You will need a copy of your most recent federal tax documents, as well as a copy of your driver's license or other official ID. Once you complete the form, it can either be mailed (with accompanying documentation) to the address listed on the website, or you can take it in person to Outpatient Services, 1A on the first floor of the DCAM building (to the left right when you enter the building). You should receive a reply within a week notifying you of your discount. You can find more details about disputing bills in general in the document titled "Disputing your medical bill."
- healthcare providers will usually not be able to tell you the cost in advance. However, it may be good to ask, at least for estimates. Also enquire if it is covered by your insurance. Apart from asking the healthcare provider, you can often call the insurance company, if it isn't an emergency situation, to see if they can clarify how a treatment or service might be billed.
- any time that you get a bill that is unexpectedly high, doesn't make sense, or contradicts what you were told originally, it might be worth it to call the doctor, SHS, the student insurance coordinator, and/or the insurance company. Folks have been billed erroneously for a variety of things, and a lot of calling and asking questions and clarifying often allows one to save hundreds of dollars. It's unfortunate that we have to do this work, but it can often be worthwhile not to take every bill as the final word on what you might owe out of pocket. At the same time, do not just sit on a bill past the deadline for making payments, they will send a collector to your house without hesitation, and you don't want that happening.
- there are a number of doctors and nurse practitioners who work at SHS, some might be a good fit for you, some might not. If you meet with someone you feel comfortable with, you can request appointments with that person when you schedule a visit. This way, you can feel like you've got a primary care physician who knows you and your medical history. Fun fact: Dr. Alex Lickerman, the director of Student Health and Counseling Services and Assistant Vice President in the Office of Campus and Student Life, has been known to work some shifts in the SHS.
- If you need hospital care, the University of Chicago Medical Centre (UCMC) will often turn out more expensive than other hospitals. If you are being referred to the hospital it may be good to ask the doctor or nurse making the referral what your other in-network options are - there is usually a tendency to automatically refer people to the UCMC. [The insurance covers more costs if you visit a healthcare

provider with whom they have an agreement, rather than an 'out of network' provider] It should be noted, the UCMC is supposed to be a good hospital, and especially if it is a complicated operation there may be grounds for considering the more expensive treatment. Again, low-income grad students are usually eligible for some amount of subsidized care.

- the SHS provides a range of preventive care (e.g., physicals, regular gyn screenings) at no cost. Take advantage!
- you can get contraceptives for free by getting a prescription from SHS, they are covered by the insurance. SHS can (at least in theory) provide long-term prescriptions and renew them on request.
- thanks to the ACA, you can get birth control prescriptions and IUD insertions at in-network clinics (such as the OB/GYN clinic at the UCMC) for low/no-cost WITHOUT A REFERRAL
- many students will qualify for IL All Kids/ Medicaid, which covers normal birth and prenatal care 100%. U-SHIP is notorious for failing to cover basic prenatal care without a lot of wrangling, so it makes sense to apply for Medicaid even if you have U-SHIP, just to cover your bases. Keep in mind that not all providers accept Medicaid, so you will need to check in advance.
- the Student Health Insurance Coordinator is Marcy Hochberg. It is her job to help you navigate the claims process and other issues you may encounter when dealing with your insurance. She can answer questions about what's covered and what's not, what your out-of-pocket costs on procedures are, etc. Her number is 773.702.1279 and her email is mhochberg@uchicago.edu. Since these profiles may be liable to change, please cross-check with the contacts provided here: <https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/contacts>

Important locations

- the university's Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS), in the Office of Campus and Student Life, oversees provision of health care for students and negotiates with United Healthcare about the terms of student health insurance. It is divided into the Student Health Services, Student Counselling Services, and Health Promotion and Wellness. The SHCS seeks input from the Student Health Advisory Board (SHAB), but SHAB, like any student advisory body (including Graduate Council), has no formal decision-making power when it comes to matters of university administration.
- the SHS (Student Health Centre) address is 860 E. 59th Street, R100. Go down S.Ellis to E. 59th, then turn right on 59th and keep walking till the Goldblatt Pavilion Entrance. After you enter you can show your card at the desk and ask for directions - you have to go left once inside the building to reach SHS.
- the student Counselling Centre has moved to a new address. It's now at 5555 S. Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637 . The entrance is on 56th street. Find more about counselling and mental health in Courtney's report.
- if you have a regular prescription you need filled, the pharmacy in DCAM (Duchossois Center for Advanced Medicine, 5758 S. Maryland Avenue, (773) 834-7002) is often cheaper than the Walgreen's or CVS in Hyde Park.
- Health Promotion and Wellness is at [950 E. 61st Street, 3rd Floor, Chicago, IL 60637](https://wellness.uchicago.edu/sites/wellness.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Explore%20HPW.pdf) . They organise things such as play time with therapy dogs, yoga sessions, stressbusters such as back-rubs, etc:
<http://wellness.uchicago.edu/sites/wellness.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Explore%20HPW.pdf>

Costs

The cost for the 2015-16 UofC U-SHIP for students is \$3,432, paid in three quarterly installments of \$1,144. Depending on your department and offer package, the university may be directly making these payments, or leave you to do so. If you have to purchase coverage (i.e., the University is not providing it as part of your funding package or you are not covered under a spouse's plan or your parents' plan), it is currently difficult to find other high-quality insurance options on the open market. However, there are some additional options on the Illinois marketplace: <https://getcovered.illinois.gov/en/how-to-get-covered/explore-coverage-options> . Foreign nationals on student visas are also eligible to purchase insurance there: <https://www.healthcare.gov/quick-guide/eligibility/> . And depending on income level, if you are an US national, you will likely be eligible for federal subsidies to help make the premiums more affordable. With the federal subsidies, a graduate student earning an average salary might potentially save \$1000-1500 for comparable coverage through the IL Marketplace. If you are a returning student, since your previous year's U-SHIP lapsed at the end of August, you are eligible within a one month window, till 30 September, to find a plan on the exchange/marketplace through the special enrollment period. New students may also be eligible to buy a plan during the special enrollment period. Do note, the national enrollment period for 2016 is open from November 1 to February 15, but since we need to confirm our insurance choice with the university by 23 October we cannot apply on the exchange after that. Any changes after that have to meet United Healthcare's criterion for mid-year changes, which are not likely to be nice.

Dependent coverage has generally been very expensive through U-SHIP. If you have children, you can look into IL All Kids (www.allkids.com), a State-subsidized program for children's health care. For the lowest income bracket, which includes many graduate students, there is no deductible and very few co-pays. However, not all providers at the University of Chicago Hospital take All Kids/ Medicaid, so you may need to seek a provider elsewhere. The Friend Family Health Center at 55th and Cottage Grove is associated with the University and accepts All Kids, for example. Due to requirements in the Affordable Care Act, there have been improvements in the USHIP package for dependents. However, since these changes are relatively new, we are still trying to access how it is actually working out.

You can find the details of the USHIP insurance package here:
<https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/insurance-2015-2016>

Dental/Vision

You can opt to add Dental and Vision coverage to your health care plan. It is usually possible to take these plans for the whole year, or for a 6 month period spanning roughly the Winter and Spring quarters. Unless you think you are going to need significant dental work in the coming year, the dental insurance is probably not going to be cost-effective for you. You can find the three packages for the year listed here: <https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/dental-coverage-2015-2016> . For regular cleanings and x-rays, you are better off simply paying out of pocket. There is a discount card included with your U-SHIP that may get you a break on dental services from various places in the city. Many dentists will also reduce their charges if you explain that you don't have insurance. Also, tread carefully if considering Groupon deals, they may not be advisable - while the cleaning itself can be a good deal (depending on the provider and so on), it has been reported that the dentist invariably suggests complicated and expensive follow-up.

The university's vision plans, in contrast with its dental plans, can be a good deal. You can find the details of the two plans offered this year here: <https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/vision-coverage-2015-2016> . For a 6-month premium, you can get an eye exam with only a \$10 copay and significant benefits towards glasses or contact lenses. If you need vision correction, you will probably come out ahead with the vision insurance. However, there are some exemptions that may surprise you, and so this may vary depending on your prescription. There may also be other factors to consider: international students, or those visiting other countries at any point in the year, often find it cheaper to get their eyes checked and purchase new glasses outside the country.

With many thanks to all those present and former GSU members, and to other members of the healthcare committee, who contributed their inputs, shared their experiences, and provided feedback on drafts,

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Disputing Your Medical Bill

In this section, I will outline the possible actions you may want to consider in order to challenge and fight back when you are charged with a ridiculous amount on your medical bill. I will first introduce my case as an example, and then list some tips and comments. Since this guide is mostly based on my personal experience, the information may not be able to cover all scenarios. However, I believe this can introduce some general ideas about how the insurance system works on campus, especially for those who are not familiar with the American medical system.

Case

I am a graduate student on campus, an international student, and I have signed up for the U-SHIP plan managed by United Healthcare insurance. During Christmas holidays, I suddenly had an extreme toothache/facial pain. At the time, it was impossible to point out which tooth was causing the pain, or whether it was even a case of toothache. Because it was Saturday evening, I knew that I would not be able to visit SHS or local dentists, and I called the nurse hot line for medical advice. The nurse gave me some basic treatment advice and then told me that I should visit an emergency room (ER) if the pain increases. Later in the evening, the pain incremented to the point that painkillers would not work, and I couldn't eat, talk, or sleep at all. So I visited the UCMC ER (Emergency Room of the University of Chicago Medical Centre). Unfortunately, the UC hospital ER did not have dental facilities for closer check-ups so all they could do was to prescribe me painkillers, which, of course, did not work.

Approximately 2-3 weeks later, I received two notices from the insurance company explaining my payments: one said that the hospital has charged \$387.00 for the doctor visit, and I will be paying \$31.79 after insurance; the other one said that the hospital has charged \$646.00 for emergency room, and I will be paying \$646.00. In other words, the company has only covered one of the two charges and denied the other. So I worked on my appeal letter for the denied case: I spoke with United Health Care (UHC) coordinators on campus, collected necessary documents, and drafted letters. However, not only did the UHC deny my case of appeal, but also cancelled what they had already paid, telling me that they should not have covered it in first place. Their reasoning was that my ER visit cannot be covered by the U-SHIP because the policy does not cover dental or optical problems. Being left with two charges that were over \$1,000, I prepared for another case of appeal with the help of on-campus insurance coordinators from Student Health Counseling Service and UHC. I also made an appeal to the UC hospital, asking them to consider providing me with financial assistance. In the end, the UC hospital took in my appeal. They provided me with "Charity Care" program and waived my ER bill ("100% discount").

Lessons I have learned

1. Visiting hospitals:

- When visiting a hospital, it is extremely important to secure official referrals from Student Health Service, Student Counseling Service, nurse advice line, or other valid parties that the insurance policy states. I had the impression that health insurance coordinators were able to aid me largely because I had followed the guideline recommended by UC student health website, i.e. calling the nurse advice line and being referred to an ER.
- Collect all documents you can from the hospital.
- I recommend that you record your hospital visit experience. If a dispute breaks out, it could easily be a time-consuming and frustrating process, and you may forget some important details or become incoherent over the time. Recording your own experience helps you to be calm, coherent, organized, and more strategic when you have to challenge your bills. I wrote down my experiences as it went (how the pain broke out, medications I have tried, when I called the nurse advice line, whom I talked to, and what I have heard, my visit experience etc.) and all of them were very helpful when I had to draft my letter or talk with insurance coordinators.
- I did not take an ambulance to the hospital. If possible, consider using other transportation means (e.g. your friend's car etc.). In America, riding an ambulance can be very costly, and there is no guarantee that the ambulance will take you to the hospital that your insurance covers.

2. When Dispute Arises from Unreasonable Amount of Bill:

- Do not panic. In America, disputes and negotiations seem to be very regular processes that everyone is expected to undergo.
- Act fast. If a dispute arises, it is incumbent on you to defend and prove your case. This will inevitably require all sorts of documentation and can be very time-consuming. For example, I had to spend extra weeks speaking to different representatives and collecting documents when the nurse advice line failed to provide my call information to the insurance company. Also, you can make your appeal only within certain designated time frame, which is not short, but not too long as well. Moreover, after the bill arrives, the time bomb starts ticking: I had four months to act or pay the hospital bill until the hospital hands over my bill to collectors.
- Check what has happened. In some cases, hospitals and companies make mistakes and end up billing patients with unreasonable amounts. For example, one of the students had his bill handed over to collectors because the hospital did not correctly enter his insurance information. Check meticulously how you ended up with the charge.
- Be proactive. Consider and take all actions that are available to you. Unlike many other countries, American medical insurance is run by private companies that pursues profit. Unless you act, no one will act for you. One thing I regret is that I had naively thought that the insurance company will pay for my other bill, and did not immediately apply for UC hospital's financial assistance program. If I had been a little more active, I would have spent slightly less period undergoing the frustration. Some people also have mentioned that Obamacare might be available

for students who are American citizens as well. This kind of information changes all the time, so invest your time and check what actions you can take.

- Be patient. The dispute will take long time to unravel. I spent 5-6 months until I was finally released from the ER visit bill.

- Be strategic. Go through the U-Ship insurance policy carefully and consider how you will be able to defend your case. (Insurance policy is available online on Student Health and Counseling Service webpage <https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/student-health-insurance-0>.)

- Speak with others. 1) Speak with insurance coordinators from UHC who have offices on campus. Although the coordinators are from the company, they are willing to help students and will provide practical advice regarding claims and disputes.

(<https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/insurance-contacts>) They are more sympathizing than representatives that you can talk to via the company's official phone center or email service.

- 2) Speak with the student health insurance coordinator from U of Chicago. Unlike the UHC coordinators, she can actively advocate for your case against claim issues.

(<https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/uc-insurance-coordinator>)

- 3) Speak with other students. Consider speaking to members of GSU (you could write to us at gsu@riseup.net), members of student health advisory board

(<https://studenthealth.uchicago.edu/page/student-health-advisory-board-shab-0>), and others who might have had similar experiences.

- 4) Speak with the hospital's financial aid office as soon as possible. You can attempt to negotiate not only with the insurance company, but also with the hospital. Sadly and fortunately, many graduate students qualify for their financial aid. This process will take some time as well, so start early. I found talking to others not only practically helpful, but psychologically soothing as well.

3. UCMC Financial aid: How to Apply

- Non-U.S citizens, including those without SSN, can also apply for the UCMC financial aid program.

- All you need to do is to fill in an application form, fill in the information, attach related documents (i.e. copy of your ID, copy of your federal tax return, documentation of family income), and send everything to their office.

- You can request the form by calling them (773 702-5276) or download it from their website (<http://www.uchospitals.edu/billing/financial-assistance.html>).

- You can turn in the application form via mail, fax or by visiting DCAM where the hospital will forward the forms for you. Keep in mind that UCMC financial service office is located outside Chicago, which means that even if you visit the hospital, you won't be able to talk to the officers who are in charge of the financial program.

Quick tips for student parents

from a friendly organizer and parent!

- No babies yet, but maybe later? Consider applying for Medicaid/ All Kids if you get pregnant or adopt - many grad students and their children qualify, and you will generally pay less out of pocket than you would for U-SHIP (the student health insurance).
- GSU advocacy resulted in a clearly articulated ***parental leave policy*** for grad student parents. It is not consistently enforced. Make sure to familiarize yourself with the policy if you plan to take leave, and contact your area Dean of Students or the UChicagoGrad staff if you find your library or Student Health Center privileges are discontinued (as they have been in the past). If you have further problems with leave, get in touch with GSU! In our experience, the best way to resolve this sort of grievance is through collective action.
- ***Childcare*** can be a headache on a student budget. Bright Horizons, the University's childcare centers, do not offer student discounts or part-time options. Unless supported by outside income, most students use a combination of part-time nannies and sitters, friends and family, nanny shares and childcare swaps, and in-home day cares. No matter what your situation, expect to spend a good deal more than the \$2000 UChicagoGrad childcare stipend (a GSU victory!) currently provides.
- We could write a book about ***schools***. The privatization push has hit Chicago Public Schools hard, and Hyde Park is no exception. The best source of practical tips is your fellow students - try the listhosts. Read up on the nitty-gritty at Chicago Public Fools (Google it).
- ***Find your people***. If you're new to town and overwhelmed with the new academic environment, it can be a challenge to meet people and make friends. Trust us: It's worth the time. Try your friendly neighborhood grad student union for a start! The Student Parent Group also runs Writing Groups to help student parents get to know each other (and to get us precious time to work!).
- Hyde Park's ***parenting e-mail lists*** are lifesavers! Sign up for the Parent Support Network list even though it costs a little bit of money. The studentparents list (signup at lists.uchicago.edu) is free and managed by UChicagoGrad. UCSPG, also a UChicago list, is the official list of the Student Parent Group. The SPG website is uchicagostudentparents.blogspot.com
- The university is finally stepping up its ***lactation space*** game, with generally available spaces to be open this fall in the Reg, Swift Hall, Booth School of Business, the Hospital, and at the Family Resource Center. Thanks, GSU!

GSU is working to make the University work for grad employees - including parents. We continue to advocate for broader access to childcare, medical care, and university infrastructure. Find out more at <http://uchicagogsu.org/category/campaigns/childcare>.

Want to work with us? Or just have unanswered questions from the flyer? Get in touch at gsu@riseup.net and mention this flyer.

(depart)mental Wellness at the University of Chicago:

By some estimates, about 1 in 4 of us have a diagnosable mental health condition. There's no shame or stigma in it. Perhaps you have a diagnosis, know what helps you, and need to find a care provider. Then you might want to skip to the 2nd page. If that's not you, though, read on...

The Bad News: Graduate students are primed for stress-related illness.

Based on the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, a tool for measuring the amount of stress or 'stress load' you've experienced over the past year, incoming full-time graduate students have a high risk of suffering a stress-related ailment within their first two years of study. Of 43 stressful life events that the survey includes, we grad students check the boxes for 12 just by enrolling and showing up for school – and that doesn't include the natural and normal life events that crop up in the age demographic of our students, such as pregnancy and birth, personal illness and injury, a change in marital status or the death of a close friend or family member.

Congratulations! If you have just matriculated at the University of Chicago you have likely recently experienced the following:

- Change in financial state
- Change to a different line of work
- A large mortgage or loan
- Change in responsibilities at work
- Outstanding personal achievement (you've nailed it to make it to UC, whatever 'it' is)
- Begin or end school/college
- Change in living conditions
- Change in residence
- Revision of personal habits
- Change in school/college
- Change in work hours or conditions
- Change in social activities

You can take it yourself here – keep in mind that some scientists have found that people from different backgrounds may react differently to stressful events, potentially due to cultural differences in how we all experience certain events. But really what all this means is that it's normal to feel a little off while settling into grad school, and it's also normal to settle in just fine – each of you will have a different experience during your time here.

The Good News: UChicago has in place many FREE and LOW-COST mental health resources for graduate students under stress from personal or professional challenges that are BUILT INTO YOUR STUDENT LIFE FEE.

ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES:

[Counseling and Psychiatric appointments](#) are **built into your student life fee** that you paid at the start of the year, so **you will not be charged on a per-visit basis** for any services you receive at this facility. Our survey of 2000 U Chicago students last year found that the biggest barrier to accessing Student Counseling Services for those who desired counseling was concerns about cost - again, as a registered student you will have access to on campus counseling services at no extra cost to you!

In other words, **might as well access these free and low-cost services while you're here!**

Student Counseling Services is now located at 56th and Woodlawn (5555 S. Woodlawn) in the old alumnae offices, and can be reached for appointments at (773) 702-9800 from 8am-5pm Monday-Friday and at (773) 702-3625 for emergency or after-hours needs. If you are prescribed any medication and choose to fill it at your preferred pharmacy, you will have to pay for that, however the on-campus psychiatric appointment at Student Counseling Services will be covered by your student life fee.

For a first visit, it's standard that you would first fill out a confidential survey on an ipad in the waiting room, some of which would be very relevant to your reasons for making the appointment, some of which not relevant at all. It's a broad survey that all incoming students fill out for appointments pertaining to any number of different things. Then you would see a counselor who would ask questions and listen to your concerns to understand your needs, and who would then offer you some services that might best assist you, such as meeting with a counselor on campus that specializes in your particular concern, or investigating referral options to an off-campus provider.

Starting Fall Quarter, Cristina Antonucci runs [Let's Talk at BSLC](#) Rm. 313, Fridays from 3-4:15 pm. Informal, confidential, drop-in support - **don't even have to give your name**. I met Christina at a counseling ctr open house - she has a PsyD and is a post-doc at Student Counseling Services (she gets us) and is a great resource. Emily Carter, PsyD, staffs Let's Talk at 5710 S. Woodlawn, Rm. 301 Tuesdays at 4-5 pm, and Let's Talk will resume at the Harris School of Public Policy at 1155 E. 60th St Rm. 153C, Tuesdays 12-1:15 pm. **This resources is anonymous and completely free, you do not have to have paid a student life fee.** Hours subject to change, so check out the [Let's Talk website](#) for current hours and FAQs.

Although there is no fixed cap on the number of on-campus consultations, Student Counseling Services tries to ensure that they have counselors available to serve 'triage' appointments and to quickly accommodate students under high distress. Therefore, **while all students can be seen on a short-term basis for counseling, students who may benefit from longer term, regular counseling care may be referred to an off-campus provider.** The exception to this is psychiatric services - the Student Counseling Center has enough psychiatrists on staff to meet the needs of the student body on a longer-term basis, as the number of psychiatric appointments per student is generally lower than the number of counseling appointments per student.

There are also **multiple student groups** on campus that provide mutual support for students with mental health issues and/or work to improve services and climate. These including [Active Minds](#), the [Organization for Students with Disabilities](#), and [Students for Disability Justice](#).

OFF-CAMPUS RESOURCES:

If you decide with your on-campus counselor, or already know, that you could benefit from long-term care, you can be referred out to an off-campus provider. For a mental health provider referred by SCS, your bill after USHIP health insurance with this off-campus provider will be \$10 per session. With our current plan, the cap in sessions is set to *1 session per day*. These mental health benefits are comparable to those of a Platinum plan (the highest level) on the public healthcare exchange.

Why take advantage of these resources?

When I tell students about the [counseling services on campus built into our student life fee](#) and the **almost free** counseling services available [off campus through referrals](#), I often get questions about what exactly Student Counseling Services is about.

Student Counseling Services - "No problem too small!"

Many students believe that their (perceived minor) distress does not warrant a visit to Counseling Services. However, the SCS's unofficial motto is "no problem too small!" They are keen to provide students with resources and options as early as possible during a potential period of distress.

Counseling Services offers a wide range of services, including:

Relationship counseling: Help in understanding and addressing conflicts with significant others, PIs, lab mates, or family members

Trauma counseling: Counseling for working through traumatic events, accidents, having survived violence or crime, or a death in the family

Academic Skills Assessment Program: Assistance with academic performance and study skills including time management, test-taking, and reading comprehension.

Sleep consultations: Because grad school keeps us up sometimes.

Addiction counseling: For drug and alcohol challenges. Also, World of Warcraft.

Defining your goals and values: Why are we in grad school again?

Psychiatric services: Starting, changing or stopping medications, or maintenance appointments

Building resilience: helping you cope with the trials and tribulations of grad school.

Student Opinions of Counseling Services and Opportunities for Feedback:

The UChicago Patient Feedback Survey last year got responses from 2,000 students representing a 'slice' of the UC demographic: graduate and undergraduate students, international and domestic students, male and female, and professional school students. This survey found that of the 797 students with enough information to judge Student Counseling Services, about 74% had a Good or Very Good opinion of SCS, 17% had a Fair opinion, and 8% a Poor opinion.

166 students were at some point dissatisfied with services they received at the counseling center, however, only 1 out every 5 dissatisfied students actually reported their dissatisfaction to health services, or to anyone else for that matter based on survey results. **If you have had an experience at SCS that you are dissatisfied with, it is important that you fill out a feedback form and voice your opinion through official or unofficial channels!** You will receive a link to a feedback form after each appointment, and you can choose to name the staff member you saw to provide specific feedback. The Director of SCS reviews these feedback forms monthly with each staff member - so those reviews add up and can make a difference! There is also a general feedback form available [here](#) at any time if you missed a previous opportunity to voice your opinion, you can share your experience in confidence with a student representative who can relay your comments anonymously.

As always, I'm happy to talk more about these services, and look forward to your questions and comments.

Take care,

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