Mindfulness at Work: Empower Physicians and Improving Patient Outcomes with Awareness Practices

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Purpose of the Bringing Mindfulness into Your Work

- Stress Cycle – Understand the stress cycle in your life to prevent burnout.
- Mindful State of Affairs – Have a better understanding of the state of affairs of mindfulness in healthcare and how it is currently being applied.
- Practice – Learn mindfulness practices to immediately implement at work and home for greater focus, self-compassion and greater patient-centered care.

Victor Frankl

- “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

The Bad News: Becoming Mindful of Burnout

- The Problem: External pressures, information overload, deliver more with less, longer hours, less personal time for renewal activities.
- Filling the Spaces –
  - Impacts job satisfaction, morale, and productivity
  - 50% of healthcare expenditures are on stress-related issues.
- Cost? Exhaustion, no zip, focus, health, burnout.

Question for You:

- How do you experience the stress in the workplace?
  - What thoughts occur?
  - What emotions arise as a result of the thoughts?
  - How does your body feel when these emotions arise?
  - How does this affect your work with patients?

The Stress Cycle

- Thoughts → worries
- Worries → fear
- Fear → “fight or flight response”
- Arousal → behavior
- Bad habits → worries
**Signs of Burnout? Familiar?**

- Procrastination
- Muscle tension
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Eating too much
- Eating too little
- Not exercising
- Being irritable
- Difficulty sleeping
- Sleeping too much
- Drinking too much
- Craving a cigarette
- Doing anything to excess.

**Lack of awareness**

**Increased Awareness**

**What is “mindfulness”?**

- Focused attention
- Intent, purpose
- Being present NOW
- Releasing judgments
- Beginner’s mind
- Non–striving
- Kindly awareness
- Letting be
- Allowing

**Applications for Mindfulness**

- MB–Interventions has research supporting stress reduction, prevention of depressive relapse, reduction in addictive relapse, and supports childbirth and parenting.
  - MBSR
  - MBCT
  - MBRP
  - MB–EAT
  - MBCP
  - And others

**Formal & Informal Practice**

- Mindfulness can be practiced formally and informally
- Formal practice: setting aside special time to be aware
  - Breathing
  - Body Scan
  - Sky of Awareness
  - Sitting, standing or reclining
- Informal practice: mindfulness as a way of life


**Informal Practice**

- Becoming aware of what is actually happening right now
- For example, at work you might be doing a number of things that takes you away from patient-centered care:
  - Fantasizing about the weekend
  - Stressing about accomplishing a task (instead of focusing on the task)
  - Obsessing about what is wrong with your job
  - Resisting getting the job done
  - Worrying about the future

**S.T.O.P. Exercise**

- This is a practice you can do anywhere, anytime to train attention, recenter and refocus.
  - **S** - Stop what you are doing
  - **T** - Take a breath
  - **O** - Observe what is happening: body, emotions and mind
  - **P** - Proceed to what is most important right now

**Discussion**

- What did you notice?

**We can change our brains!**

- Neuroscientists are finding that our brains are more “plastic” or malleable than previously thought
  - ‘Neuroplasticity’
  - Mindfulness meditation actually alters brain circuitry

**New pathways in the brain**

- Improved attention
- Heightened awareness
- Increased happiness
- More positive thinking
- Decreased Rumination
- Better focus
- Enhanced decision-making

**Dr. Richie Davidson, University of Wisconsin**

- Team of researchers using brain imaging technology found that mindfulness meditation led to:
  - Greater neural activity in areas of brain associated with feelings of calm and happiness
  - Less neural activity in areas of brain associated with stress, sadness and worry
  - Stronger immune system response to flu vaccine, suggesting strengthened immunity
  - Study participants also reported increased energy, improved mood, and less anxiety
If You Can Name It, You Can Tame It:

- In 2007 Matthew Lieberman and colleagues showed two sets of pictures to people each showing an angry and a fearful face.
- Underneath one set of photos were the names Dick and Jane and underneath the other set were the words anger and fear.
- Labelling the emotions showed an increase in activity in the prefrontal region and a decrease in activity in the amygdala or “fear circuit.”

“Putting Feelings Into Words: Affect Labeling Disrupts Amygdala Activity in Response to Affective Stimuli” Psychological Science, pp. 421–428.

Mindfulness Reduces Self-Referencing/Rumination in Brain:

- When exposed to sad scenes (The Champ & Terms of Endearment), mindfulness practitioners showed more right lateral recruitment in somatosensory areas (experiential) and reduced activity in narrative focus = decreased depression scores.


A.C.E Exercise

- This is a practice you can do to deepen your presence when things are difficult and refocus
  - A – Awareness of Thoughts, Sensations, Emotions
  - C – Collect Attention on the Breath
  - E – Expand awareness throughout body and zero in specifically on where you feel the stress, giving it warm, kind attention to settle in.

Mindful Listening

- When it comes to patient-centered care, it helps to have some practice in mindful listening.
  - Listening can be passive or active
  - Do you pay attention to others when they speak?
  - Are you listening with your full awareness?
  - Where is your mind while they speak?
  - How does it feel to listen mindfully?

Benefits of Mindful Listening

- Dual benefit – Relaxes patient because they feel heard and activates your parasympathetic nervous system – relaxation response.
- Activates Empathy and Compassion, critical for self-compassion and patient-centered care.
- Experiment: See the Person – “Just Like Me”
Guided Meditation – Listening

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”
- Plato

Experiment: Kindness Practice in the Midst of Difficulty
- Connect with your heart and cut the banter

- Sayings
  - May you feel safe
  - May you be happy
  - May you be healthy in body and mind
  - May you be free from your distress

- Practice this with colleagues and patients as an experiment today.

To Sum It Up:
- Many evidence-based options in the field today (i.e., MBSR, MBCT, MBRP, MB-EAT, MBCP)
- You can engage with formal practice to cultivate presence and self-compassion (i.e., Body Scan, Sitting Meditation, Lovingkindness, Sky of Awareness Meditation)
- You can engage informal practice to help build empathy, compassion and presence for better patient-centered care - Cultivate mindful listening, practice, “Just Like Me,” and informal kindness practices
- Train Attention Management - Integrate STOP, ACE, and Mindful Listening into your day. Be patient, nonjudgmental and gentle with the wandering mind.
- Reduce healthcare costs - If 50% of health-related claims are stress related, finding ways to better manage your stress and the stress of your patients can reduce our overall healthcare costs.

Question and Answer