Mindfulness in Medicine: Promoting Physician and Patient Wellness

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Objectives
1. Define mindfulness as a process and an outcome
2. Identify ways in which mindfulness tools can contribute to greater well-being in physicians.
3. Identify benefits of mindful awareness for physicians in improving patient outcomes.
4. Identify benefits of mindful awareness and mindful practice for patients dealing with acute and chronic diseases.
5. Distinguish between basic evidence-based mindfulness techniques.

Questions for the Audience
Brief History

- Origins in ancient Eastern meditation practices
- Modern day mindfulness considered a secular practice inspired by 2,600-year-old Buddhist teachings
- Historically practiced in isolated settings but now used in hospitals, clinics, schools, and businesses
- Jon Kabat-Zinn founded 1st mindfulness-based treatment approach—Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

What is Mindfulness?

- According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness means: “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”
- Also defined as the awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, caring, and nonjudgmental way
- In other words, it is a heightened awareness; helps one be responsive rather than reactive; quiets all of our excess brain chatter
- The opposite of multi-tasking!
- Important to distinguish mindfulness as both a process (mindful practice) and outcome (mindful awareness)

Why focus on the present?

I have spent most of my life worrying about things that have never happened
-Mark Twain
Mindful Awareness

- Knowing what you are experiencing as you are experiencing it
- Seeing clearly and accepting what is here and now
- Feelings
- Thoughts
- Perceptions
- Involves simply observing internal self without trying to get more of what one wants (pleasure, security), or pushing away what one doesn’t want (e.g., fear, anger, shame)

Mindful Awareness

- Patterns of behavior are conditioned and result in living on autopilot
- Awareness involves distinguishing between beneficial and unbenevolent tendencies
- People can develop insight from being aware of their internal experiences and ultimately make more deliberate choices
- Ability to sustain attention and switch focus of attention
- Crucial for effective rapport building with patients

Accepting the Present Nonjudgmentally
Mindful Practice
Way of intentionally pursuing mindful awareness

Formal practice: systematic meditation practices that cultivate mindfulness skills (brief or intensive)

Informal practice: application of mindfulness skills in everyday life; generalize what is learned in formal practice

Let’s Try it Together

“Mindfulness has to be experienced to be known.”

(Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005, p.8)

Mindfulness in Medicine
Benefits for your Patients! Benefits for you!
Mindfulness as Medicine

• Recent studies show benefits for patients with acute and chronic diseases such as:
  - Chronic pain, cancer, cardiovascular disorders, epilepsy, HIV/AIDS
• Meditation used successfully in treatment and prevention of high blood pressure, heart disease, migraine headaches, & autoimmune diseases (e.g. diabetes and arthritis)
• Proven helpful to curtail obsessive thinking, anxiety, depression, and hostility

Mindfulness as Medicine

• Dr. Herbert Benson & colleagues at Harvard Medical School (1968) tested whether meditation could counter physiological effects of stress
  Found:
  - Heartbeat and breathing rates slow down
  - Oxygen consumption falls by 20%
  - Blood lactate levels drop
  - Skin resistance to electrical current increases fourfold
  - EEG ratings indicate increased alpha activity

Mindfulness-Based clinical interventions

• Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)
  - 1st and most popular; intensive 8-week program includes formal and informal mindfulness practices & didactics
• Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT)
  - 8-week program aimed at treating depression, particularly relapse prevention
  - Similar to MBSR; varies in terms of mindfulness techniques
Mindfulness-Based clinical interventions

- Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)
  - Conducted individually; helps reduce avoidant coping styles

- Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)
  - Helps improve emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and ability to be mindful of others and their environment

Mindfulness as Medicine

- Cancer patients who participated in an MBSR program showed improvements in mood (65%) and stress symptoms (35%) (Speca, Carlson, Goodey, & Angen, 2000)

- German research group found that women with Fibromyalgia showed improvements on measures of pain, coping, quality of life, anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints after completing MBSR (Grossman, Tiefenthaler-Gilmer, Rayot, & Kesper, 2007)

The Mindful Physician
Self-Care for Physicians

- Self-care is critical for health care professionals to have the strength and clarity to care for others.
- Up to 60% of physicians and nearly 50% of 3rd year medical students report symptoms of burnout*.
- Burnout associated with poorer quality of care and lower quality of life.
- Mindfulness may help with stress management, emotion regulation, energy level, empathy, and ability to be fully present for both good and bad daily life experiences.

Physician Burnout

- Patient overload
- Administrative pressure
- Work/life balance
- Exhaustion
- Lack of autonomy

Burnout and Quality of Care

- Higher levels of depersonalization resulting in lower patient satisfaction
- Longer post discharge recovery time
- Increase in medical errors
- Reduced standards for patient care
- Increased physician and medical staff turnover rates
- Workplace productivity and efficiency
- Physician depression, exhaustion, substance abuse and suicidal ideation.
Self-Care for Physicians

- Mindfulness increases self-awareness and the ability to recognize how thoughts, feelings, perceptions may be impacting personal & professional relationships
- Dr. Michael Baime (among others) says "A key goal of mindfulness training is to help physicians stay connected with their patients and practice deliberately on a moment-to-moment basis."

How Some Physicians Benefit From Mindfulness

<table>
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<th>Survey measure</th>
<th>Baseline score</th>
<th>15 months later</th>
<th>Decline</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional exhaustion</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70 primary care physicians who took a year-long mindfulness course reported lower stress and burnout symptoms.

The Impact of a Mindful Physician

- Improved patient-centered care
- Decreased depersonalization
- Increased patient-centered communication
- Increased patients and clinicians engaged in rapport building and discussion of psychosocial issues
- More positive emotional tone
- Increased patient satisfaction
Mindfulness techniques - Formal Practice

1. Sitting Meditation (Breathing Awareness)
   - Focus is on the breath
   - Tune into sensations of breath entering nose or mouth, or rise and fall of abdomen
   - Note sensory experiences as they arise—hearing, reactions (e.g. enjoying a thought, urge to scratch an itch), then bring attention back to breathing
   - Breath-counting: count each exhale; note when mind wanders then simply start over & return to counting exhales
   - Deep breathing: use of 4 senses

2. Mantra Meditation
   - Focus is on a word, syllable, or phrase of choice repeated over and over
   - Make a list and read aloud to see what feels right or inspirational
   - Common mantras: “one”, “OM” (pronounced aum-traditional mantra), or “calm”
   - Say mantra silently or aloud
   - Be aware of each repetition and bring attention back if mind wanders
Body Scan

- Helps develop mind-body connection
- Increases bodily sensations related to stress, pain, and other forms of discomfort
- Usually practiced lying down with arms by sides, palms up, and legs hip-width apart
- Focus attention SLOWLY and deliberately on each part of the body from head-to-toe or vice versa
- Notice sensations, emotions, thoughts, then let them go and return to exercise

Walking meditation

- Focus is on the act of walking
- Mentally note “lifting”, “stepping”, “placing” as they happen naturally
- Pay attention to sensations in feet and lower legs
- Alternate way is to count steps with breathing ("in...2...3, out...2...3")
- Remember goal is not to get somewhere or exercise; it is to develop mindfulness

Eating meditation

- Pay attention to each aspect of the eating experience
- Notice colors, shapes, smells as well as intentions and desire to begin eating
- Observe process of chewing and swallowing; silently label to help maintain focus or use non-dominant hand
- Works best when eating alone
Mindful Yoga

- Practicing mindfulness skills while practicing yoga
- Notice feelings, areas of tension, judgments, comparisons with others, etc. and gently let them go
- Practice on own requires intention to be mindful while going through poses
- Helps calm the mind, cultivate kindness for the body and awareness of the body’s capabilities

Mindfulness Techniques-
Informal Practice

- Incorporating mindfulness as a way of life vs an isolated formal practice
- Practice mindfulness during everyday tasks that typically occur on autopilot—mindlessly
  - Grooming, eating, washing dishes, driving
- “Mini meditation” exercises can be practiced while waiting in lines, in traffic, or on hold
- Intentionally tuning in to body and breath throughout the day (ex. quick body scan while sitting in class)

5-3-1 Daily practice to reduce burnout

- Meditate for 5 minutes
- Identify 3 good things that happened
- Do 1 act of kindness
Easy Ways to Incorporate Mindfulness into Everyday Practice
• Choose one activity a day (brushing your teeth, taking a shower, getting the mail, etc.)
• Mindful movement – stretching, walking
• Deep Breathing
• Recognize distraction and stress as it is happening and work to let it go quickly and easily!
• Practice between patients to clear your mind
• Spend time reflecting at the end of the day

Common Mindfulness Misconceptions
• You need to be mindful 24 hrs, 7 days a week
• Mindfulness is a religious practice and conflicts with many religions
• Mindfulness is difficult
• Mindfulness is pushing away thoughts or emotions
• Mindfulness stops you from feeling emotions
• Your mind wanders too much for meditation
• Mindfulness takes a lot time
• Mindfulness is the same as relaxation
• Mindfulness benefits are always immediate

“When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one that has opened for us.” - Alexander Graham Bell

“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, nor to worry about the future, but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly.” - Buddha
Questions?

References


Altman, D. Advanced Mindfulness Techniques That Change The Brain. Workshop (2014), Charlotte, NC.


