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Quote of the Month

You can't make positive choices for the rest of your life without an environment that makes those choices easy, natural, and enjoyable.
– Deepak Chopra

Mindfulness, Schmindfulness... You Decide

Physicians are burning out at an alarming rate. Twenty-five to sixty percent of physicians across specialties report burnout and it has been estimated that as many as **400 physicians** commit suicide each year.¹ Forty-four to ninety-eight thousand unnecessary deaths and one million avoidable injuries are caused by medical errors annually.² Research has shown that inattentiveness to patient concerns can have significant impact on patient care.³

The word on the street (and throughout the literature) is that mindful practice can reduce physician burnout and improve physician wellbeing, psychosocial orientation, and empathy.⁴ It has been reported that the process also enables physicians “to listen more attentively to patients’ distress, recognize their own errors, refine their technical skills, make evidence-based decisions, and clarify their values so they can act with compassion, technical competence, presence, and insight.”⁵

Generally speaking, practicing mindfulness exercises can have many possible benefits beyond those listed above, including: reduced stress, anxiety and depression; less negative thinking and distraction; and overall improved mood. Findings on the effects of mindfulness suggest that mindful practice can also lead to improvements in attention and working memory and emotion regulation.

So, what IS mindfulness? The term mindfulness basically refers to a person’s tendency to remain “purposefully and nonjudgmentally attentive to their own experience, thoughts and feelings.”⁵ There are many ways in which this concept can be achieved. Furthermore, mindful practice is free, can be easy, and does not have to take very long!

Laurie Seidel MSN, RN will lead a Current Topics session in March on *Mindfulness in Daily Life*. Laurie is a mindfulness practitioner who enjoys practicing with her colleagues. She is also the PI for a project entitled *Determining the Effects of a 4-week Mindfulness Practice Course for Healthcare Professionals on Mindful Awareness, Quality of Life, and Burnout*.

In the meanwhile, try practicing the following simple and practical mindful techniques below. Practicing some basic techniques and attending Laurie’s session will allow you to get a sense for if mindfulness might be for you without diving head first into the unknown. So, go ahead, dip your toes in and test the waters...

- **Patient to Patient Pause:** When you place your hand on the doorknob to move from one patient to the next, pause to consciously put the previous patient “aside” before entering the next patient’s room to give your full attention to him/her.
- **Mindful Hand Washing:** As you turn on the water and soap up your hands, consciously feel the warm water and the sudsy soap and take the moment to think about something, anything for which you are grateful and pause to appreciate it.
- **Mindful Walking:** As you are rushing through the hallways, take a few deep breaths, and just acknowledge that during your walk you will try to be aware of your environment and your internal state (e.g., your breath, thoughts, feelings, sensations).

Shari A. Whicker, EdD

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