Including Everything: Mindfulness and Transforming Suffering in Palliative Care

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Objectives

1. Understand what mindfulness is;

2. Know its clinical applications and recent areas of advancement;

3. Understand how suffering can be addressed by mindful awareness practices.
What is Mindfulness?

• Secular or religious?

• What about you?

Third Annual Palliative Care Institute Conference
What is Mindfulness?

“Non judgmental non elaborative awareness” of the what is happening right now, in this moment. (JKZ 2003)
Mindfulness Techniques

• Focus on particular objects or on no object
  body scan, breath, walking, loving-kindness

• Varying practice lengths and protocols

• Different settings and populations
Mindfulness Functions By...

- Paying attention on **purpose** - interrupts automatic negative thoughts;

- Paying attention in the **present** - interrupts rumination and worry;

- Minimizing negative appraisals of the situation.
Mindfulness Supports a Healthier Response

- Mindful Appraisal
- Turning towards with curiosity
  - Aware of breath & body -> more present-centered
  - Aware of thoughts & emotions: less elaborative reactivity

Modified, Courtesy of Mindfulness Northwest
What’s the Evidence?

- EEG and Blood pressure
- NEUROPLASTICITY
- IMMUNOBIOLOGY
What’s the Evidence

Neuroplasticity
MRI/MRF data

- Sustained increase in attentional and visceral awareness
- Anatomic changes in brain structure
  - increases in those of emotional regulation
  - decrease in those with judging and reacting
- Increased activity in areas correlating with present self
What’s the Evidence

Immunobiology

- Decreased inflammatory response
- Increased immune response
- Genetic modulation of inflammatory response
Mindfulness Supports a Healthier Response

- **Increase in Parasympathetic activation**
- **More Oxytocin, less Cortisol**
- **Perception is Powerful**
  - Instead of Fight or Flight, a considered and chosen Response is possible.

modified from materials provided courtesy of Mindfulness Northwest
Mindfulness
Clinical Efficacy

Every day – change, stress, people, time, role, work

Chronic pain - changes in perception of pain in reactivity to pain
Mindfulness
Clinical Efficacy

**Behavioral Health** - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Addiction Disorder
  - Mood disorder in cancer patients

**Medical Conditions** - IBS
  - Rheumatoid Arthritis
What’s the Evidence Summary

While not yet definitive to rigorous standards, there is cumulating evidence and no study has suggested a negative outcome.

It’s all to the good
Mindfulness for Caregivers

NEW FAST FACT
FAST FACTS AND CONCEPTS #316
MINDFULNESS SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR CLINICIANS
Nicholas Kerr D.O

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Mindfulness Techniques for Caregivers

- Turn off electronic devices
- Remember to breathe
- Do a rituals at the beginning of a visit with your whole sensory awareness (eg hand washing, opening the door)
- Sit at bedtime, fully in your body, aware of sensations
Mindfulness in Palliative Care

Expanded Definition:

“Non judgmental non elaborative awareness” of the what is happening right now, in this moment.

...with wisdom and compassion
Suffering in Palliative Care

Suffering - “the affective experience of unpleasantness and aversion associated with mental or physical harm.”

The “something extra” that arises from the loss of who we think we are or what we hope for.

“Suffering is not you.”
“Suffering is not you”

Dependency

Ability to do and think

Being a burden

Loss of those you love you are leaving behind

What is this seen through the lens of mindfulness?
"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."

Dr. Viktor E. Frankl
Healing is moving toward wholeness in response to injury or disease, (Mount, 2007) trauma or loss.

“The healing that is affected is the ability to come to terms with things as they are.”

JKZ
Research in Palliative Care and EOL

Coping - increased relaxation, comfort, happiness after sessions
- increased acceptance, curiosity and patience

Suicidality ??
Caveats and Questions

Research Limitations

Time and training restrictions

Focus and energy at the end of life
“We all have reservoirs of life to draw upon of which we do not dream.”

William James