

More Mindful Healthcare Providers

By Amanda Guay

Imagine walking into a room of busy healthcare professionals and experiencing a row of people walking markedly slowly across a silent space. That is what you may have experienced at North Country on any one of six early morning Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction or MBSR classes offered recently to our medical practitioners. MBSR or mindfulness meditation is a way to quiet and calm the mind by paying non-judgmental attention to the moment to moment experience. It helps restore and maintain a sense of personal balance and develop the skills to avoid emotional and physical depletion. Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that primary care providers that took part in a yearlong mindfulness course became more present, attentive and less emotionally exhausted. Moreover, the doctors involved in the practice reported an increased ability to empathize with patients and understand how patients' life situations can impact illness. A recent New York Times article states that there is a growing awareness among doctors that being mindful can not only improve the way providers engage with patients, but can also alleviate the stresses associated with clinical practice.

North Country's intention in offering the class was to introduce the practice to our healthcare professionals for their benefit, along with opening a conversation about how to meaningfully offer MBSR classes for patients experiencing stress related concerns. The Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program that was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center has shown to produce positive effects on patients' well-being. The Stress Reduction Program offers an eight week intensive training that engages patients in drawing on their inner resources to care for themselves and find greater balance and peace of mind for over thirty years. Research conducted shows positive outcomes for patients, including:

- An increased ability to relax
- An increased ability to cope with stressful situations
- Decreased anxiety, panic and depression
- Reduced pain levels and enhanced capacity to deal with pain
- Greater energy and enthusiasm for life
- Increased self-awareness, trust and acceptance
- Reduced symptoms associated with a number of medical diagnoses
- Changes in brain gray matter concentration associated with learning and memory, emotion regulation and perspective taking
- Greater ability to act effectively under high degrees of stress

Ultimately, mindfulness will likely be proven to be a critical tool in the field of healthcare. The mindfulness based stress reduction practice promotes a high level of wellness both for individuals seeking to manage an illness or maintain health. North Country continues to seek ways we might incorporate mindfulness training and skills into patient services.

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