Mindfulness: A Practice for Yourself, a Teaching for Your Patients.

Jackie Levin RN, MS, CHTP, AHN-BC
Consultant, Coach and Clinical Educator
Integrative Approaches to Health-Wellness and Pain, Palliative and Hospice Care

Objectives

• Mindfulness Fundamentals
  – To have an experience of mindfulness
• Define components of internal and external healing environments
  – The nurse as therapeutic milieu
• Application of mindfulness in your practice with self and others
  – Practical techniques and strategies to take with you

Nursing:
To relieve the suffering of others through skillful practice, compassion and wisdom…while maintaining inner and outer balance.

Mindfulness is a tool we can use to gain this inner stability throughout our day.
Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique in which a person becomes intentionally aware of his or her perceptions, feelings, thoughts and mental phenomena in the present moment, skillfully.

Piyal Walpola (www.wisdomthroughmindfulness.com)

Mindfulness Components

• Focused Attention
  – Gentle sustained focus upon an object e.g. the breath
• Open Monitoring
  – Observing the flow of thoughts, emotions, body sensations from moment to moment in order to recognize patterns
• Complementary and integral processes

Mindfulness is not

• Falling asleep
• Daydreaming
• Guided Imagery
• Accepting everything without discernment
• “Everything is not all good!”
I am the big blue sky, my thoughts the clouds

Mindfulness is an Invitation

• Into the space between the thoughts
• Into reflection on the choices we are making
• Bringing the mind inward vs. outward
• Recognize projections
• Challenges our basic assumptions and beliefs

Basic Principles

• Non-judging
• Patience
• Beginner's Mind
• Trust
• Non-striving
• Acceptance
• Letting go

• Unconditional friendliness toward self
• Becoming the Observer
Mindfulness Requires

• Focus
• Concentration

Developing Skillfulness

Where do you place your attention?

– Skillful focus
  • generative, brings flexibility, reflection,
  • self-regulation of thoughts, emotions, responses
– Unskillful focus-
  • fixed negative self-concept
  • Recycling thoughts and memories
  – future (worries)/past (regrets)

Rhythm of Mindfulness


Mindfulness Practice
Focus on the breath, thoughts, feelings

Attention to the Breath

Mind wanders off the breath

Remembering/Awareness
Mind is on pain, worries, memories

Reconnect
Attention to breath

Notice attitude, skillful and unskillful thoughts. Practice unconditional friendliness toward self.
What gets in the way?

Limbic System: Amygdala

- Emotional reactivity center
- Any smell, sound, sight, touch, taste, thought goes through the Limbic System and produces a cascade of neurotransmitters.
- Response to threat/pleasure activates this center

Stress, Anxiety, Impulsivity

- Stress Response
  - Fight or Flight
  - Sympathetic System activation
- Anxiety, impulsivity
- Pain management strategies feel limited
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
Mindfulness: Choice

- Initiate Parasympathetic System
- Continue activating Sympathetic System
- Cannot be both systems simultaneously
- Every moment you activate the parasympathetic neuro-cascade is another moment the sympathetic system is at rest

Stimulus: Pleasant/unpleasant
milliseconds

Affective State Limbic System gets the message

“Hey, something is happening here!” Anxiety, fear, happiness, joy

Patterned Reflexive Responses

Unskillful response: Depression, panic, Impulsivity, negative self-talk

Mindfulness Training

Skillful response: Trust all feelings/experience. Observe, reflect, respond

Benefits of Mindfulness

- Mindfulness reduces activation of Limbic System
- Increases Attentional Regulation,
  - Cognitive and Sensory
- Reduce negative self-rumination
- How might this help the person with pain?
  - Earlier recognition of what thoughts, body position, relationships and behaviors worsen or improve pain/pain management
Why Mindfulness in Pain Management and Addiction Disease?

An Invitation into Inquiry.

Pain: More than Cause and Effect

- Pain gets logged in brain’s library of emotions
- Emotions become associated with that pain event
- Affected by everything that is going on in that moment
  - Mood
  - Past experiences
  - Your expectations
- Now part of your the nervous system response.

Consider all that affects us

- Injury during a fight vs. scoring a goal
- Past experiences
  - Last time you healed quickly and well
  - Last time you got an infection, chronic pain syndrome
  - History and story we recycle can determine response to pain.
Routes of Suffering
Permanence vs. Impermanence

Nurse as Therapeutic Milieu

Peace: It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.
  • Unknown

Benefits for Clinician

• More relaxed
• Enhances listening to the deeper meaning and messages from patient
• More insight into dynamics in environment
• You become the mirror for the pt to see their possibilities
Benefits to Patient

- Pt feels seen and heard
- Opportunity for insight and awareness
- Opportunity for changing perceptions and behaviors
- Potential for greater management of pain experience and addiction disease

Shift the Angle of Perception for a Wider View

Potentially shift fear, anxiety and a limited view of possibilities into greater potential for healing, reduced pain and improved sense of wellbeing

Breathing in, I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.
Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment.
Breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment

Thich Nhat Hanh
Integration of Mindfulness

- Formal Practice
- Informal Practice

**Formal Practice:**

Useful guidelines

- Ideally, have a particular place and hour where and when you do it
- Do it daily for a period of time (which will vary for each person and type of practice
- Proper posture
- Breathing
- Concentration

**Informal Practice**

- Breath
- Take one daily activity (brushing teeth, making breakfast, sitting in traffic) and make it a mindfulness practice
- Cue words, sounds, places
Challenges to Applying Mindfulness

• Fear of silence
• Unconscious material surfacing
• Monkey Mind
• Sleepiness
• Physical discomfort
• Strange sensations and images
• Discouragement from expectations

Contact Info

Jackie Levin RN, MS

jackieluna22@gmail.com
www.leadingedgenursing.com

Port Townsend, WA
C: 206-304-7703

Research Samples

• Crosswell et al. (2007). Neural Correlates of Dispositional Mindfulness During Affect Labeling. Psychosomatic Medicine.