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What do you feel are the benefits to you from learning mindfulness?
It's difficult for medical students to justify spending time on "wellness" when there are so many demands for our time. What I have come to see more, however, is that the more you are able to incorporate the principles of mindfulness into your routine, the better student you will become. Case-in-point - while studying for/taking Boards, instead of getting worried and letting my thoughts run away with me, I was able to focus and remain much more calm and present. We spend so much time in lecture, reading, studying, etc. that a small increase in efficiency through mindfulness, if compounded over many hours, can increase our productivity while simultaneously helping us to relieve stress, improve sleep, and reap the myriad other benefits that have been associated with regular mindfulness practice.

You have spent a lot of time and effort getting mindfulness classes set up for med students. How worthwhile has this seemed to you?
Very much so. Our main goal with setting up mindfulness classes was to expose students to the subject and to get the ball rolling. We wanted to create an organization that could grow to match the needs of busy medical students. We already have 60% more students registered for the class this year than last year at the same period, and we hope to continue to reach more and more students.

How do you find the time to incorporate mindfulness practice into your busy schedule?
It is difficult. For the class, we receive several CDs that walk us through various mindfulness techniques. Because of the variability of my schedule during the day, I decided to listen to one of the CDs every night when I go to bed. It ensures that I practice mindfulness every single day. Plus, I have never had more restful sleep.

How will this help you as a physician?
I hope to apply mindfulness to every aspect of my future practice, but the aspect I am most keen on is in listening. It is always a challenge to be fully present and actually listen to everything the patient is saying, and not allow my mind run away and prevent me from forming a connection. The practice of mindfulness helps us both to recognize when this is occurring, and to return to the present more easily.