WHAT IS THIS MINDFULNESS?

The word “mindfulness” is becoming more prominent in all walks of life lately, particularly in the community of medicine. Mindfulness is simply the quality of being present in the moment – of training yourself to focus on what you are doing while you are doing it without interference from chronic worries or miscellaneous thoughts. In addition to improved focus and clarity, the process of mindfulness training increases the ability to handle stress and emotional ups and downs. Obviously these are useful qualities to have in the operating room, studying for a test, or coping with a challenging clinical encounter.

The concept of mindfulness has been around for thousands of years. But only recently, due to the increased pressures facing providers, has medicine taken advantage of the benefits of this established practice. In fact, research has shown that for healthcare providers mindfulness brings a decrease in burnout and anxiety, significant increases in compassion and improved patient satisfaction.

Mindfulness is being incorporated at Stanford in various educational trainings for medical students, residents and faculty. There are a variety of options available on and near campus (see our WellMD Mindfulness page).

In view of this potential benefit, our committee has created a working group under the leadership of Dr. Lars Osterberg and Dr. Tara Cornaby to evaluate mindfulness-related offerings in multiple modalities (in-person, online, apps, etc.). Our goal is to make recommendations and to help facilitate access for providers interested in mindfulness training. We also would like to create a sense of community through regularly scheduled live and virtual group mindfulness sessions and discussions.

Some people are just naturally more mindful. Take a self-assessment!

Recent Research:


Barriers to healthcare providers caring for themselves using mind-body modalities included lack of time and high work demand leading to scheduling difficulties. Facilitators included evidence of benefit, creative scheduling, and financial and leadership support.


For 45 first year residents at one institution, 40% met criteria for burnout. “Physician empathy and emotional intelligence were not significantly correlated with burnout or resilience. Self-Compassion and mindfulness were positively associated with resilience and inversely associated with burnout.”

For details of these and more events/classes, plus CME wellness courses, see WellMD Calendar.