

Conference Report

Mind–body tools: Sustaining practitioners and patients[☆]

Integrative medicine is defined as a combination of mainstream and complementary modalities with high quality research data showing safety and effectiveness. The focus of alternative or integrative therapies is as much on wellness, as on disease, and these therapies emphasize a partnership between the patient and the practitioner. The field of Mind–Body Medicine has evolved in which modalities once considered beyond the limits of health practice, are now being used routinely (e.g. relaxation, hypnosis, biofeedback, visual imagery, tai chi, qi gong, spirituality, prayer, and others). Mind–Body Medicine recognizes the research which demonstrates the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral factors can affect health. Medical practitioners from all fields of medicine are at risk of burnout. Using Mind–Body tools effectively could prevent this outcome.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine defines Integrative Medicine as a combination of mainstream and complementary modalities with high quality evidence based research data showing safety and effectiveness. The focus of these therapies is as much on wellness, as on disease. These therapies emphasize a partnership between the patient and the practitioner. While many current studies focus on the treatment potential of complementary and alternative therapies, care providers can also benefit from a deeper understanding and personal use of Mind–Body Medicine.

A whole field of Mind–Body Medicine has evolved in which modalities once considered far beyond the limits of health and healing are now being used routinely (e.g. relaxation, hypnosis, biofeedback, visual imagery, tai chi, qi gong, spirituality, prayer, and others). This field focuses on the interactions of brain, mind, body, and behavior. Mind–Body Medicine recognizes the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral factors can affect health. The fundamental approach of this field is one that respects and enhances the patients' capacity for self-knowledge and self-care. Patients have an opportunity for personal growth and transformation and health care providers are seen as catalysts and guides in the process. Inherent to the process is a focus on

empowering the patient to tap into their own innate healing resources.

Physicians practicing conventional medicine can improve the quality of the care they provide through using these techniques personally and enhancing their health and attitudes. Burnout is an escalating problem in oncology. Emotional exhaustion was reported by 53% of physicians and 30% of allied professionals in this field. One third considered jobs outside cancer care [1,2]. There is a need for tools to sustain human oncology resources. Mind–body techniques have been shown to reduce anxiety and increase productiveness in medical students [3] and mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) has been taught to 5000 healthcare professionals based on model developed at University of Massachusetts by Jon-Kabot Zinn. Research has shown that most participants experience long-lasting improvements in physical and psychological symptoms and positive changes in attitudes, behaviors, and self-perception. A randomized trial of MBSR showed changes in brain activation patterns consistent with more effective processing of negative emotions under stress and an increased immune responsiveness in the meditation group compared to controls [4]. Clinical trials found MBSR effective for chronic pain, anxiety, fibromyalgia, depression, and others [5].

The “relaxation response” was a term coined by Herbert Benson. He defined this response as a decreased heart rate, a decreased rate of breathing, and the presence of slower brain waves. These changes in the autonomic nervous system, hypothalamus, and brain correlate with positive emotions and changes in states of consciousness. New research even suggests that the relaxation response is accompanied by beneficial immuno-modulation.

Intervention strategies such as visual imagery, yoga, biofeedback, tai chi, qi gong, laughter, exercise, spirituality, and prayer have also been shown to be helpful similar to MBSR. Most of these techniques initiate the relaxation response neutralizing “flight or fight” stress. Others increase endorphins or cause beneficial immune modulation. All are potentially helpful for those treating or receiving treatment for cancer. Approaches have benefits and advantages, minimal risk, and are easy to teach. Since interventions are complex, more research is indicated and should examine the short- and long-term effects for both practitioners and patients. However, since considerable evidence shows positive effects on psychological and physical function and improved quality of life, consideration should be given to making these techniques

[☆] This report is based on a presentation given at the 4th International Conference on Cervical Cancer.

accessible to practitioners and patients [6]. Future research is likely to yield new insights to enhance effectiveness and individual application of interventions.

References

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