

“ Meditation Becoming Common for Physicians”

At our Institute, we begin our staff meetings with one of us leading a meditation. It is a great way to leave our busy work behind and refocus. Interestingly, studies are now showing that more and more physicians are also engaging in meditation and mindfulness practices.

I am not surprised that physicians are turning to meditation and mindfulness because a high percentage of healthcare professionals are now reporting that the practice of medicine has become quite stressful. And, they have heard that twenty minutes of meditation is a great way to alleviate stress.

I am presently engaged in a course of study in Mind-Body Medicine at Saybrook University. One of my favorite courses has been a course on mindfulness. In the class we studied articles that have appeared in the medical literature which clearly demonstrate the benefit of meditation and mindfulness. We also participated in a variety of mindfulness practices.

My professor, Dr. John Patterson, reminded us that meditation is an ancient practice that originated in India more than 5,000 years ago. It is a technique in which the individual focuses his or her attention on a particular thing.

Most often, it is paying attention as one breathes in and out. In my meditation course we were invited to begin by taking a deep breath from our abdomen, then our chest. It was called “soft belly” breathing. After the deep breath was taken, we held it for three seconds, and then slowly expelled the air through pursed lips.

Patterson said the reason it is good to focus on our breath is it is always with us. We don’t have to look for anything, just breath in and out. Whenever thoughts intrude, we simply return our attention to the breath.

What happens is, by focusing our attention, we are requiring our mind to pay attention to the present moment. Not to something that took place in the past or something we fear may happen in the future. Getting in touch with our body is a great way to stay in the present moment. This is also true for yoga and tai chi practices.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, M.D., a psychiatrist at Mass General Hospital in Boston, introduced Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in 1979. He defined mindfulness as “moment-by-moment focused attention, without judgment.” Kabat-Zinn has written many articles on the benefits of MBSR and has spoken in countless medical conventions worldwide.

Twenty-five years have passed, and the message appears to have finally begun to impact physicians and they are taking up the daily practice. The beautiful thing about that is when physicians are engaged in these practices, they will pass them on to their patients.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'J'.

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