

Mindful Practice Curriculum

Mindful practice refers to our ability to be aware, in the moment, on purpose, with the goal of providing better care to patients and to take better care of ourselves. Being mindful is at the core of clinical competence. The purpose of this program is to give residents (and students and practicing physicians) some tools to help them become more mindful during daily clinical practice.

The Family Medicine Residency Program offers approximately 6 sessions per year as part of the mindful practice curriculum. Similar sessions are also offered by 6 other residency programs and for all 3rd year students at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry.

The program has two goals: to improve the quality of care and to improve physician well-being. Clearly, these two goals are linked. The sessions focus on four attributes of mindful practice: attentive observation, critical curiosity, informed flexibility, and presence.

Why the Mindful Practice program was developed

In response to the increasing pace and complexity of medical practice, physicians (and those in training) are experiencing unprecedented levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout -- affecting their sense of well-being and the quality of care they provide. A powerful but under-recognized approach to these challenges is to enhance physicians' capacity for mindfulness. Mindfulness in medicine refers to the ability to be aware, in the present moment, on purpose, with the intention of providing better care to patients and to take better care of ourselves. Mindfulness is at the core of clinical competence. The proposed program will give students, residents and practicing physicians the skills to become more mindful during daily clinical practice.

Attributes of Mindful Practice

Attentive observation refers to being able to observe without prematurely making judgments that would otherwise distort or diminish one's capacity to understand. This involves monitoring one's own biases, thoughts and emotions: "observing the observer observing the observed."

Critical curiosity refers to being welcoming and receptive to new data, surprises and challenges, rather than succumbing to availability bias, premature closure and being overly rigid or concrete.

Beginner's mind refers to the ability to take a fresh perspective on a familiar problem. Being able to take more than one perspective simultaneously means that more diagnostic and therapeutic options and technical skills can be applied to a particular situation.

Presence involves being there physically and emotionally for patients, focusing on important tasks, being a good team player and accurately communicating an understanding of the patient's concerns and feelings (empathy).

Mindful practice modules will help students and residents develop a capacity for mindfulness, by:

- being responsive rather than reactive
- noticing things about oneself and situations even though they might be unpleasant;
- acting with awareness and intention (not being on “automatic pilot”), and
- focusing on experience, not the labels or judgments we apply to them (e.g. understanding patients and their problems rather than just categorizing or judging them).

Participants will develop clinical habits of self-questioning, self-monitoring and self-awareness. The program is based on several educational theories and techniques: mindful practice, the Rational-Emotive model, Appreciative Inquiry; Narrative Medicine and Reflective Questioning.

Mindful Practice Curriculum

The mindful practice curriculum uses several educational methods throughout a series of modules that are aimed at developing mindful practitioners.

- Brief awareness and meditation exercises help participants increase awareness of their own thoughts, feelings, decision-making processes, emotional reactions and technical skills.
- “Appreciative inquiry” interviews and written narratives focus both on highly effective as well as challenging experiences in health care; they focus on personal attributes that can lead to higher quality care and physician well-being. Narratives are discussed in pairs or small groups; interviews are generally dyadic. We emphasize reflective questioning, deep listening and a non-judgmental stance.
- There is also theme-related didactic material and discussion.

In general, we build on positive, constructive ways that individuals have developed to respond effectively in stressful situations. This approach is contrast to other settings which focus on problems and blame. Homework exercises will help participants become more mindful in everyday work settings.

Students and residents at the University of Rochester take part in parallel curricula throughout the year. Students at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry have an introductory module towards the end of their second year and one module during each of the participating third-year clerkships (Medicine, Neurology, Pediatrics, and Psychiatry. In addition, faculty members of each participating department are trained to offer the educational sessions. Sessions each have a theme, some of which are listed below:

Module 1: Noticing

Module 4: How doctors think

Module 2: Being with suffering

Module 5: Time

Module 3: Professionalism

Module 6: Self-care and burnout

Module 7: Responding to errors

Module 10: Death and Dying

Module 8: Mindful Communication

Module 11: Conflict

Module 9: Balance

Module 12: Teams and Partnerships

The course manual, training manual and other materials are available to medical educators.

Publications regarding Mindful Practice

Our recently published research in JAMA demonstrated that courses in mindful practice result in lower burnout, and greater well-being, empathy and patient-centered orientation to clinical care. In addition, mindful practice may result in fewer errors, a greater sense of presence, the ability to see a situation from multiple perspectives before reacting, and greater satisfaction from work.

Our current health care environment makes mindful practice very challenging. Accordingly, these sessions will address these external barriers as well as participants' and learners own internal barriers to self-awareness such as unexamined emotions, premature closure, over-concreteness and emotional exhaustion – which then manifest as feeling overwhelmed by suffering, ignoring the obvious, treating others like objects, withdrawing from unpleasant or anxiety-provoking situations, having difficulty tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty, and making hasty decisions.

Mindful Practice sessions prepare students and residents to develop situational awareness, interpersonal awareness, self-awareness and self-monitoring during everyday work and be attentive and present in clinical settings. Self-awareness is an essential element of communication, technical skill, professionalism, teamwork, and life-long learning.

Michael S. Krasner, MD; Ronald M. Epstein, MD; Howard Beckman, MD; Anthony L. Suchman, MD, MA; Benjamin Chapman, PhD; Christopher J. Mooney, MA; Timothy E. Quill, MD. Association of an Educational Program in Mindful Communication With Burnout, Empathy, and Attitudes Among Primary Care Physicians, *JAMA*. 2009; 302(12): 1284-1293.

Ronald M. Epstein, MD. Mindful Practice, *JAMA*. 1999; 282: 833-839.

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