Mindfulness and the Pursuit of Meaning in Coping with Pain

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Objectives

• Understand how mindfulness and creating meaning through committed action helps patients ease their way through pain
• Learn two strategies for teaching patients mindfulness skills
• Recognize the importance of mindfulness for healthcare providers
First-Hand Experience

• Mindfulness exercise:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH3_64mLCU8

• Now turn to the person next to you—take turns sharing a special feature of the moment that you notice
Dimensions of Pain

- Neurophysiology
- Pain Sensation
- Suffering
- Pain Behavior
Challenges

Challenges in helping patients in palliative care with pain?

Experience using nonpharmacological strategies for pain?

Confidence in helping patients cope with pain?
Mindfulness and Personal Freedom

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” Vicktor E. Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning

• Let us explore how mindfulness is one of our core human freedoms--the ability to choose what we attend to, how we attend to it, and the value we bring to that pursuit
Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgementally (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

Mindfulness has to do with the quality of awareness or the quality of presence that a person brings to everyday living (Marsha Linehan)

What is special about the moments that you live fully?
Benefits of Practicing Mindfulness

- Increased sense of well-being
- **Reduction in pain-related suffering and behavior**
- Increased attention to living each moment fully and effectively
- Mindfulness helps us focus on what matters to us—moment to moment
- Supports wise choices and effective behavior

Linehan 2015
Goals of Mindfulness

- Be present to your own life
- Live fully despite pain
- Be present to others

Our minds are wired to wander. We constantly wander into the painful past, feared future, physical pain and painful realities, uncertainty and our constantly unfinished to-do list; we miss cherished moments because of this.

Notice this? What do you do about it?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU7vKitN4Ro
Mindfulness in Palliative Care

• Ask for *permission* to help your patient learn to reduce the suffering associated with pain
• Explain that pain medication may not be enough; thus, learning to control attention “*moment to moment*”, and to fully participate in each moment, can enhance quality of life despite pain and his or her difficult circumstance
• Talk to your patient about your own *mindfulness practice* and how you are open to sharing your mutual experiences in learning to live mindfully
Core Mindfulness Skills

- Observing
- Describing
- Effectively
- Participating
- One-Mindfully
- Nonjudgmentally

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The Wanderings of Pain

- Pain is a daily existential challenge
- The sibling of persisting pain is uncertainty
- Persisting pain and uncertainty are dual challenges that can impact a person’s sense of being grounded and flexible
- Pain can interfere with making every moment count
- Pain and uncertainty can trigger waves of intense emotion and wandering off into streams of distressful thought
- Practicing and embracing mindfulness can help patients live fully in the present moment, remain grounded in their wisdom, and make wise choices and effective responses
Mindfulness Practice

Structured practice:

- Body scan
- Sitting and walking meditation
- Attending to your breath
- Notice what you are experiencing through your senses
- Observe your mind without judgment
- Describe and label your thoughts (“thinking”)
- Attending to brief acts of kindness
- Mindful eating
Mindfulness Practice

Unstructured practice:

- Attending to mindfulness during daily activities by full participation

*Why should providers who teach mindfulness to their patients practice mindfulness?*

*Who practices mindfulness? What do you? What is the effect?*
Mindfulness Practice

- Time, effort and practice
- A thousand times returning to the moment after wandering
- Nonjudgment, perseverance and practice
- Embracing mindfulness as a way of living each day

Why is practice so important?

What approaches works best for helping patients buy into the important of practicing to improve coping?
Patients in Pain Who Practice Mindfulness

• Report an increased ability to accept the presence of pain and less reactivity to it
• Pay closer attention to how one’s mind can wander into unhelpful pain-related thinking and an increased ability to return attention back to the moment
• Find that persistent practice helps strengthen mindful presence
• Demonstrate more self-compassion when wandering more than one would like
• Reduce suffering and improve appreciation for the opportunity offered by each lived moment
Q & A

Questions?

Concerns?

Learning?

Commitment?