

Ethics and Mindfulness: Issues in Growing, Training & Valuing the Teaching of Mindfulness

Lynette Monteiro¹, Frank Musten²

¹*Ottawa Mindfulness Clinic, Director of Professional Training, Ottawa, Canada*

²*Ottawa Mindfulness Clinic, Director of Program Development, Ottawa, Canada*

Background and Objectives

The rapid growth of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) poses a significant challenge for professional institutions that train clinicians to offer mindfulness programs. Although several MBIs provide structured training in their respective modalities, there continues to be considerable debate around the thoroughness of the training, including how best to address the implicit, and therefore often unexamined, ethical stances embedded in the curriculum.

Methods

This paper explores two primary themes important to training clinicians in MBIs: the role of ethics in MBIs and the ethics of offering MBIs. The role of ethics in MBIs is relevant to examining the subtle influences of culture, concepts of psychopathology, and the professional's individual worldview and values that "enter the room". Second, the ethics of offering MBIs are discussed with respect to two areas: (1) transparency in obtaining consent, including potential iatrogenic effects when treating vulnerable populations and (2) clarity of the end-point use of mindfulness by individuals within groups or organizations whose functional values may be counter to the intention of alleviating suffering and cultivating compassion.

Results

The explicit ethical frameworks in the curricula of second generation MBIs use models informed by an understanding of values clarification and moral development. The ethics in mindfulness are explored with respect to its potential impact on persons of diverse culture and faiths and how values can be offered as points of practice with sensitivity to diversity. The ethics of offering MBIs is also explored, with an emphasis on cultivating trainee awareness of the ethical issues with regards to discerning those who may be at risk of iatrogenic effects or misunderstand the intent of mindfulness practice.

Discussion and Conclusion

Greater attention is being given to how best to cultivate values that underpin mindfulness practices, in order to support their authentic embodiment by the trainee as a mindfulness teacher. While first and second generation MBI training programs aim to cultivate depth and sensitivity in training and competency issues, there remain concerns whether the necessary competencies can be attained given the short time frames of clinical training programs.