

Exploring Mindful Practice: Pilot Mindfulness Course To Reduce Stress And Burnout In 1st and 2nd Year UK Foundation Junior Doctors

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Background and Objectives

Although much work has been done in studying how mindfulness helps reduce stress and burnout in medical students, there is little that looks specifically at newly qualified junior doctors, who are at particularly high risk of developing burnout. It is unclear why this is the case. This Pilot evaluates the feasibility of a mindfulness course to help reduce stress and burnout, as well as exploring the concept of ‘mindful practice’, and potential indirect benefits for patients.

Methods

Participants of this study were 10 Foundation Year 1 (FY1) and 10 Foundation Year 2 (FY2) doctors from a busy central teaching hospital in Liverpool who voluntarily registered interest in the course and attended (Total N=20). A 6-week course was run by an external teacher employed by ‘Breathworks’, a social enterprise that delivers mindfulness courses and delivers teacher training. Each weekly 2h session took place after working hours in the education centre of the hospital. Pre and post course evaluation questionnaires were given to participants to complete. The primary outcome measure was self-reported stress levels before and immediately after the course. Secondary outcome measures included wellbeing, quality of working life, effect on patient relationships and perceptions of staff support.

Results

Doctors stated they felt inadequate support for their wellbeing at work. However, after the course they reported lower stress levels, greater wellbeing and an improvement in their relationships with patients. Some reported a greater capacity for empathy, as well as feeling better able to understand their patients.

Discussion

There are limitations to what this study can show in terms of effect, however as a preliminary study there are some useful findings to guide a larger study. Perhaps working best as part of a wider wellbeing program, such interventions also require robust support at an organisational level if doctors are to feel better supported.

Conclusion

This pilot demonstrates a feasible package of mindfulness for foundation doctors, however further work in a larger formal study is warranted. The concept of ‘mindful practice’ needs further exploration especially given the potential benefits for both the doctor and the patient.