

Study shows positive impact of mind-body course on well-being of medical students

May 1 2013

A Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) study shows a mind-body class elective for medical students helps increase their self-compassion and ability to manage thoughts and tasks more effectively. The study, published in *Medical Education Online*, also discusses how this innovative course may help medical students better manage stress and feel more empowered to use mind-body skills with their patients.

Allison Bond, MA, a third-year medical student at BUSM, served as the paper's first author. The course was designed and taught by co-author Heather Mason, MA, founder and director of the Minded Institute.

"An effective career in medicine requires technical competence and expertise, but just as important is the ability to empathize and connect with others, including patients," said Robert Saper, MD, MPH, director of [integrative medicine](#) at Boston Medical Center and associate professor of [family medicine](#) at BUSM. However, [medical students](#) experience tremendous demands from workload, stress and competition from other students to succeed, resulting in burnout and a decreased ability to connect with patients, according to studies.

"Research has shown that mindfulness meditation and yoga may increase psychological well-being, which is why we looked at how a course based on these principles could impact medical students," said Bond.

The 11-week course, Embodied Health: Mind-Body Approaches to Well-Being, was open to first and second year medical students in good

academic standing. It was developed to teach students about mind-body approaches, and the neuroscience behind the activities, that they might not otherwise learn in medical school but could use to help their patients achieve better overall health. Offered for the first time in Spring 2012, it met once weekly and included a 30 minute lecture about the neuroscience of yoga, relaxation and [breathing exercises](#) followed by a 60 minute yoga, deep breathing and mediation session. Each student was asked to practice the techniques (breathing, yoga, etc.) at least three times a week.

Participants filled out surveys before the course began and after it ended, and were asked about perceived empathy, perceived stress, self-regulation (ability to develop, implement and flexibly maintain planned behavior to achieve goals) and self-compassion. They also were asked to compose a one-page essay at the completion of the course to discuss if what they learned helped them personally and whether it influenced their ability to cope with stress or enhanced their sense of well-being.

Overall, responses indicate a statistically significant increase in self-regulation and self-compassion. There also was a decrease in perceived stress and an increase in empathy, although not statistically significant. The essays also indicate that the course helped many students:

- feel more aware of their bodies,
- feel a sense of community among their peers despite the competitive environment,
- build confidence in using mind-body skills with patients and
- better manage stress.

"Our study provides compelling evidence that mind-body approaches have benefits for medical students and could have a positive impact on their interaction with peers and patients," said Bond.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

Citation: Study shows positive impact of mind-body course on well-being of medical students (2013, May 1) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-05-positive-impact-mind-body-well-being-medical.html>

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