

Medical students taught meditation techniques to prevent burnout and improve care

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Doctors commonly tell patients that stress can be harmful to their health. Yet when it comes to reducing their own stress levels, physicians don't always heed their own advice.

Part of the problem, according to researchers at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, is that medical schools don't include meditation and stress-reduction [training](#) in their curriculum. However, for the past three years all third-year students at Wake Forest Baptist have been provided guided relaxation and mindfulness meditation training known as Applied Relaxation and Applied Mindfulness (ARAM), thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The training is described in the fall issue of the *Annals of Behavioral Science and Medical Education*.

Studies estimate that 20 to 60 percent of physicians experience burnout at some time during their careers. This level of distress and strain can have a significant influence on the quality of care that doctors provide. It can also decrease empathy and compassion for patients and increase the likelihood of medical errors, said William McCann, Psy.D., associate professor of family and community medicine at Wake Forest Baptist and lead author of the paper.

"Research has repeatedly shown that [mindfulness meditation](#) and

relaxation techniques can help moderate the influence of stress," McCann said. "In every stress-management program either mindfulness or relaxation is always included to decrease both the mental and physical wear and tear caused by stress."

The goal of the Wake Forest Baptist training was threefold: to help familiarize future doctors with techniques recommended in many medical treatment plans for patients; to reduce stress and prevent professional burnout; and to enhance performance by improving working memory and empathy and by moderating performance anxiety.

The ARAM training was composed of three sessions integrated into the third-year family medicine clerkship. According to McCann, 90 percent of the students found the class beneficial.

"The practice of medicine is a stressful challenge even for our best and brightest students," McCann said. "The rate of burnout among [doctors](#) is sobering and every [medical school](#) needs to include [stress](#)-management training in their curriculums."

Wake Forest Baptist is one of only a few medical schools in the United States to include [mindfulness](#) or [relaxation](#) training in its curriculum, McCann said.

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

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