

Mindfulness training can help doctors improve well-being and communication, study finds

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A new study involving researchers from the University of Toronto has found mindfulness training for doctors improved their communication

with patients and colleagues, and led to positive cognitive and behavioral changes.

The study, by Elli Weisbaum, an assistant professor in the Temerty Faculty of Medicine's department of psychiatry, [was published](#) in *CMAJ Open*. The [research](#) looked at the experiences of 28 doctors who received five weeks of [mindfulness training](#).

"This study's findings are encouraging for all health care professionals interested in developing healthy and compassionate workplaces. My hope is that these findings contribute to both individual and systems-level change," said Weisbaum, who is cross-appointed to the Dalla Lana School of Public Health's Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation and is acting program director for New College's Buddhism, psychology and mental health program in the Faculty of Arts & Science.

Trevor Young, U of T's vice-president and provost, as well as a professor in Temerty Medicine's departments of psychiatry, and pharmacology and toxicology, and Nicholas Chadi, a clinical assistant professor at the Université de Montréal, co-authored the study.

The research involved doctors who came from a range of specialties, including surgery, psychiatry, emergency medicine and family medicine.

Over a span of five weeks in 2019, participants attended weekly in-person applied mindfulness training sessions, based on the teachings of scholar and Zen Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh.

Researchers then conducted interviews to understand how the training impacted doctors' work and daily lives.

"Participants report that integrating brief mindfulness practices at the beginning and end of their workday can lead to more effective regulation

of workplace stressors, which can lead to feeling more energized at the end of the day," the study authors wrote.

"Participants also report that a brief mindful reset at the end of the day can reduce the transfer of occupational stressors, such as frustration, to their home environment."

As well, participants told researchers that mindfulness training helped them to have better skills when it came to balancing their work and home lives.

They said the training assisted them with giving themselves permission not to rush in their work, while still being efficient and effective.

Participants also reported better communication with their patients and their colleagues as a result of mindfulness training. This included enhanced [self-awareness](#) and decreased reactivity when confronted with challenging situations, they told researchers.

The study also found mindfulness training increased focus for physicians during patient interactions, and resulted in a higher awareness by physicians of their own biases around patients.

Ultimately, participants said the skillsets developed through mindfulness training led to more patient-centered diagnoses and treatment plans.

"[Due to mindfulness training,] participants describe having a greater awareness of what they contribute to challenging interactions with patients and colleagues. Through this understanding, they can implement more compassionate communication styles, which helps them set and maintain clearer boundaries for themselves during frustrating or irritating interactions," the researchers wrote.

Weisbaum says the study's findings point to the value of mindfulness training for physicians, and that the study is a "call to action" for clinicians and policymakers.

She says there is more research underway to examine how applied mindfulness can help address and mitigate physician burnout.

"This research shows that mindfulness training benefits physicians at an individual level, through more effective management of occupational stressors," Weisbaum says. "It also shows [potential benefits](#) to [the] broader health-care delivery system."

More information: Elli Weisbaum et al, Improving physician wellness through the Applied Mindfulness Program for Medical Personnel: findings from a prospective qualitative study, *CMAJ Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.9778/cmajo.20220252](https://doi.org/10.9778/cmajo.20220252)

Provided by University of Toronto

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