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|  | **Mindfulness, Mental Health and Medical Students** |

**Mindfulness for Medical Students at Bristol**

Since October of 2011, medical students at Bristol experiencing low mood, anxiety or stress have been offered the opportunity to attend an 8 week Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy Course (MBCT). Courses are taught by a team of three qualified teachers: Dr Alice Malpass – Research Fellow at Bristol University, Sarah Millband – psychotherapist and mental health mentor (both trained to teach mindfulness at Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice, Bangor University) and Dr Julia Wallond – GP (trained to teach mindfulness at the department for Clinical Education Development and Research, Exeter University). Referred to MBCT are made via student GP, counselling and advisory services.

**Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy – an 8 Week Course**

MBCT is a manualised 8 week course, well supported by evidence from a variety of research trials, and recommended by NICE as a relapse prevention programme. The course offered at Bristol has been adapted to make it relevant and sensitive to the specific vulnerabilities of medical students. Despite the commitment required to participate in the course, which includes daily practice at home as well as attending the 8 sessions, attendance on the courses has been very good – most students attend 6 or more sessions, with unscheduled teaching accounting for most absences.

Students who express an interest in learning mindfulness are sent comprehensive information about what the course involves and then invited to attend an Orientation and Assessment meeting before beginning the course. This enables both the student and the course teachers to make a decision together, about whether this is an appropriate time to begin learning mindfulness. Screening tools (including GAD-7 and PHQ-9) are used to inform this decision and students are also required to complete a Wellbeing Questionnaire, in which they are asked to disclose experience of recent upsetting events. This is because the experience of learning mindfulness can be challenging and it is recommended that learning takes place at a time when life experiences and mental health symptoms are not too challenging. Evaluation of the courses run to date indicate that MBCT has been very effective in helping students to manage their stress more effectively, to improve their self-care and has increased their confidence in relating to difficulties experienced by their patients.

**What do medical students say about their experiences of learning mindfulness?**

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| Awareness of stress and early warning signs | “I now notice more when I’m getting stressed and try to do something about it rather than just letting it be there and I am better at knowing what kinds of things stress me out…” |
| Improved concentration and managing workload | “When I used the three minute breathing space during the day, I found that was quite a useful tool to refresh myself, allow myself to regain concentration and get back to work.” |
| Acceptance of vulnerability and limitations | “You can’t do everything….everyone finds things difficult and it’s ok to find it difficult. So I took that (judgement) away, just that things are hard and it’s ok to say ‘oh, I can’t do it now and I need to do this and this before I can do it’…” |
| Recognising how habitual patterns of thinking link to anxiety | “I’ve learned that that it’s possible to have more of a steady mood by keeping track of what’s going on for me in the present…and that I worry too much about things that are yet to happen…” |
| Increased tolerance of difficulty and what to do when it shows up | “I learned to notice my experiences, to notice my feelings too – not shy away from them or pretend they’re not there if they hurt – and also to encourage myself to look after myself….I’ve learned that, really, I’m a positive person…but I can feel low occasionally, but that there are ways to get out of that spiral…” |
| Empathy towards others | “I’m mindful of my own reaction towards patients and their stories and the hospital situation and thinking about patients and their suffering….I’d like to say that it’s improved my ability to empathise with patients and what’s going on with them…” |

**For further information:**

* about MBCT for medical students at Bristol University, you can contact any of the teachers:

**Alice Malpass** A.Malpass@bristol.ac.uk

**Sarah Millband** sarahmillband@live.co.uk

**Julia Wallond** julia.wallond@yahoo.com

Reference for looking at GMC guidance on Supporting medical students with mental health conditions Supporting\_medical\_students\_with\_mental\_health\_conditions\_\_\_July\_13.pdf\_52834713

* about training to teach mindfulness:

CMRP: Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice – Bangor University mindfulness@bangor.ac.uk

CEDAR: Clinical Education Development and Research – Exeter University mindfulness@exeter.ac.uk

* about supporting yourself to learn mindfulness skills:

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World – Mark Williams and Danny Penman, Piatkus 2011