MINDFULNESS IN PARTICIPATORY MEDICINE: Context, Research & Clinical Evidence for the Relevance of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) On-the-Ground

Brant Rogers 1 MS, RYT, Zeynep Sunbay-Bilgen 1 MS, & Michael Christopher 2 Ph.D.  
(1 The Stress Reduction Clinic at Yoga Hillsboro.  2 School of Professional Psychology Pacific University)

Abstract: Saki Santorelli (2010) eloquently spoke of the value of mindfulness in the model of participatory medicine. Inspired by his talk we reviewed the literature and found no cohesive clinical example of mindfulness in participatory medicine in the Journal of Participatory Medicine or elsewhere so we decided to do something to help out (Rogers et al., 2012). We aimed to illustrate the consequences of mindfulness practice from a participatory medical viewpoint by measuring two pertinent consequences: 1) Enduring positive medical and therapeutic outcomes 2) Transformation of attitudes toward self-care. We followed our clinic’s empirical, clinical approach over four years to assess the outcomes for MBSR participants who came with a wide diversity of healthcare concerns and life challenges. Using a number of established measures (DUKE Health Profile, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), Center for Mindfulness Questionnaire) we found significant and enduring improvements in participants’ perceived stress, self-care attitudes and behaviors, as well as physical, mental and social health status from pre-program through a 4-year long-term follow-up (Table Graphics 1 & 2, Tables 1 & 2). A survey of participants’ health care providers showed that they found a universal improvement in the self-care attitudes and behaviors of their patients (Table 3). Participants reported a continuing engagement in mindfulness practice, long-term. Our study reports on the continuity of one clinic’s work: one community, a diversity of participants, with the participation of local clinicians. We combine this with three decades of research acknowledging that the practice of mindfulness is a global, tangible and enduring path to the relief of measurable suffering with a growing ecological validity in the domain of health care. We believe it is a cornerstone for the model of participatory medicine. What do you think?

Participatory Medicine: Tom Ferguson acknowledged patients, caregivers and their networks as powerful medical resources in a model of healthcare that came to be known as participatory medicine (Ferguson 2007). Jon Kabat-Zinn also wrote about participatory medicine, “As care-givers, we have to remind ourselves of what we of course already know, namely that all human beings, including ourselves and our patients have, to varying degrees but almost always far more than we suspect, deep and life-long inner resources for learning, growing, healing, and personal transformation” (Kabat-Zinn, 2000). While articulating this model of medicine differently they both acknowledged the immense value of self-care: patients proactively engaging their lives, illness and communities.

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Table Graphics 1 & 2. Health measure outcomes over time for MBSR. (Rogers et al., 2012)
develop and include mindfulness practice as foundational to participatory medicine?

Table 2 (from Rogers et al., 2012)
Percentage reporting positive changes in self-care attitudes after MBSR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
<th>Drop in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>level &amp; stamina</td>
<td>physical activity</td>
<td>frequency of pain</td>
<td>severity of pain</td>
<td>blood pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=183</td>
<td>n=169</td>
<td>n=134</td>
<td>n=100</td>
<td>n=96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=number of participants who noted that this aspect of health was an issue for them at the beginning of the program. From a questionnaire used at the Center for Mindfulness and developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Table 3 (from Rogers et al., 2012)
Clinicians’ assessment of positive changes in self-care attitudes after MBSR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taking care of themselves</th>
<th>Taking care of their health</th>
<th>Feeling able &amp; assertive &amp; able to express their health needs</th>
<th>Feeling able &amp; assertive &amp; able to express needs</th>
<th>Feeling able &amp; assertive &amp; able to communicate their needs to you.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: From a survey of 30 clinicians who estimated the positive self-care change in a population of 107 of their patients after they completed MBSR training at the clinic. Elements are derived from those in Table 2.

Participatory Medicine and this Presentation: We believe that such global and enduring outcomes and the accompanying transformation in attitude toward self-care affirm MBSR’s effectiveness as a complementary learning intervention and demonstrates that mindfulness can be a compelling cornerstone of the evolving model of participatory medicine. The local community of clinicians as well as participant family and friends continue to make a large number of referrals and partner with this clinic’s MBSR program as a consequence. What do you think about this and how can we work together to further develop and include mindfulness practice as foundational to participatory medicine?

Further Reading