The “Return” of Inner Wisdom: Welcoming Spirituality Back into Healthcare and Medical Education

Steven D. Hickman, Psy.D.
Assistant Clinical Professor, Clinical Psychologist
University of California at San Diego
Department of Psychiatry
Moores UCSD Cancer Center
Director, UCSD Center for Mindfulness

A Matter of Perspective

Mind-Body-Spirit

What We Know “From the Inside Out” About Our Experience of Life

Body
Mind
Spirit

What We Learn From “The Outside In”

Modern Medicine
Body
Mind
Spirit
Organized Religion

The “Whole Person” From The Perspective of Organized Religion

BODY
MIND
SPIRIT

The “Whole Person” From The Perspective of Modern Psychology

SPIRIT
MIND
BODY
The “Whole Person” From The Perspective of Modern Medicine

“Integration” Through Shifting on the Same Plane: Reuniting Mind and Body

What are the risks of over-emphasizing some aspects and downplaying others?

The Limitations of a Single Perspective in Understanding the Whole Being

We think we can congratulate ourselves on having already reached the pinnacle of clarity, imagining that we have left all these phantasmal gods far behind. But what we have left behind are only the verbal specters, not the psychic facts that were responsible for the birth of the gods. We are still as much possessed today by the autonomous psychic contents as if they were Olympians. Today they are called phobias, obsessions, and so forth; in a word, neurotic symptoms. The gods have become diseases; Zeus no longer rules Olympus but rather the solar plexus, and produces curious specimens for the doctor’s consulting room . . .”

– Carl Jung
Commentary on ‘The Secret of the Golden Flower’

Athena: Daughter of Zeus, Goddess of Wisdom

Definition of Wisdom: Knowledge, understanding, experience, discretion, and intuitive understanding, along with a capacity to apply these qualities well towards finding solutions to problems. It is the judicious and purposeful application of knowledge that is valued in society.

(Wikipedia Definition)

The question becomes: What knowledge do we choose to value when training doctors and practicing medicine?

Sources or Forms of Wisdom

Outer Wisdom: Derived from authoritative sources and knowledge gained from others

Inner Wisdom: Derived from direct observation, experience, introspection, reflection

Historically, we have valued each of these differently relative to the other, with varying results
True Integrative Medicine Through Incorporation of Inner and Outer Wisdom

- Fully honoring the accumulated knowledge and experience of others
- Incorporating what we know from our own experience, reflection and introspection
- Acknowledging and dwelling within the tension between these two perspectives, while drawing upon each as needed
- Meeting suffering fully, with all our resources accessible and available in each moment to bring to bear on that suffering.

Understanding Integration in the Larger Context

Anne Harrington delineates six “Narrative Templates” to outline the history of “Mind-Body Medicine”
- The Skeptical Narrative
- The influence of charisma
- The Detective Narrative
- Symptoms as messages that may not make organic sense
- The Secular Miracle Narrative
- The power of positive thinking
- The Lament Narrative
- Stress as a disease of the modern world
- The Nostalgia Narrative
- The power of community and intimacy
- The Exoticism Narrative
- The East as spiritual exemplar

The Power and Potential Inherent in Awareness of Inner and Outer Wisdom

- “When we reside in awareness, we are resting in what we might call an orthogonal reality that is more fundamental than conventional reality, and every bit as real. Both certain moment by moment, and both demand their due if we are to inhabit and embody the full scope of our humanness, our true nature as sentient beings.”
  - Jon Kabat-Zinn
  - *Coming To Our Senses*

Inhabiting the Orthogonal Dimension: Spaciousness and Possibility

The situations we and our patients face can afford the possibility of . . .

- Love
- Hope
- Joy
- Forgiveness
- Compassion
- Faith
- Awe
- Gratitude

Are these qualities you would find helpful in the practice of medicine?

Imagine the Possibility of Integrating These Qualities into Medical Education and Practice

George E. Vaillant, M.D. defines this “amalgam of positive emotions that bind us to other human beings” as . . .

- Spirituality

How might we cultivate these qualities as human beings, as doctors, as people who suffer?

- One option (as suggested by Kabat-Zinn) would be through the practice of mindfulness
  - Moment-to-moment . . .
    - . . . Non-Judgmental . . .
    - . . . Awareness

- Frequently cultivated through the practice of meditation, but it is NOT meditation itself.
One Way of Cultivating Mindfulness: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

- Developed and implemented at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center over the past 20 years by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn
- The original inspiration for MBSR was the stress and suffering of medical students
- Rooted in ancient Eastern traditions
- Thousands of patients have completed MBSR programs around the world

The Foundation of MBSR

The "radical" premise (for modern Western medicine) that "there is more right with you than wrong with you"

- Typically an 8-Week Program of . . .
  - Meditation
  - Other Mindfulness Practices
  - Gentle Yoga/Stretching
  - Group support/discussion
  - Weekly classes for 2.5 hours
  - Daily practice of 45-60 minutes
- Ostensibly for "stress reduction" but there may be more at work than that . . .

Research Findings to Date . . .

- Improved quality of life among diverse samples of patients
- Reduced physical symptoms
- Decreased psychological distress


Selected Findings: Immune Function

Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenzweig, Muller, Santorelli, Urbanowski, Harrington, Bonai and Sheridan Psychosomatic Medicine 65:564-570 (2003)

Selected Findings: Brain Function

Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenzweig, Muller, Santorelli, Urbanowski, Harrington, Bonai and Sheridan Psychosomatic Medicine 65:564-570 (2003)

Selected Findings: Cortical Thickening

Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness Lazar, Kerr, Wasserman, Greer, Greer, Treadway, McGarvey, Quinn, Duara, Benson, Rechtschaffen NeuroReport Vol 16 No 17 28 November 2005
An “Instrumental” Implementation of MBSR With Medical Students

- Goal was to prepare future doctors for the stresses of medical practice
- Found:
  - Reduced self-reported state and trait anxiety
  - Increased scores on overall empathy
  - Increased scores on measures of spiritual experience
  - Results replicated in the wait-list control group
  - Results were consistent across trials
  - Results were observed during high-stress exam period

Effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on Medical and Premedical Students

Shapiro, Schwartz, Bonner

Journal of Behavioral Medicine, Vol. 21, No. 6, 1998

A “Systemic” Implementation of Mindfulness Into Undergraduate Medical Education

- Health Enhancement Program (HEP) theme-based 5-year undergraduate medical curriculum at Monash University in Australia
- Fosters student well-being and enhances holistic medical education

Objectives of the HEP

- Learning personal self-care for managing stress and maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- Enhancing student physical health
- Laying the foundations for clinical skills in stress and lifestyle management
- Integrating HEP content with biomedical, psychological and social sciences
- Understanding the mind-body relationship
- Developing a holistic approach to healthcare
- Developing a supportive environment among the student body
- Enhancing performance

Mindfulness Component of the HEP

- Mindfulness Practice (2 5-minute “full stops” and as many 15-30 sec “commas” as needed)
- Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Tasks
  - Perception
  - Letting Go and Acceptance
  - Presence of Mind
  - Listening
  - Self-discipline
  - Emotions
  - Expanding Self-Interest

Outcomes of the HEP

- Cohort study among 2006 first-year students
- N = 148
- 90.5% reported applying mindfulness practice
- Improved:
  - SCL-90 Depression
  - SCL-90 Hostility
  - SCL-90 Global Severity Index
  - WHOQL Psychological Domain

Enhancing the health of medical students: outcomes of an integrated mindfulness and lifestyle program Hassed, de Lisle, Sullivan, Pan Advances in Health Science Education 2008 (ePub ahead of publication)

One Model for How Mindfulness Practice Might Relate to Spirituality

An Integrated Model

Implications for Integrating Mindfulness into Medical Education

"Mindful Practice" (as defined by Epstein)
- Active observation of oneself, the patient and the problem
- Peripheral vision
- Pre-attentive processing
- Clinical curiosity
- Courage to see the world as it is rather than as one would have it be
- Willingness to examine and set aside categories and prejudices
- Adoption of a beginner's mind
- Humility to tolerate awareness of one's areas of incompetence
- Connection between the knower and known
- Compassion based on insight
- Presence

Mindful Practice: Epstein. Journal of the American Medical Association, September 1, 1999, Volume 282, Number 8

Where Spirituality Arises: The Healing Relationship

Churchill and Schenck interviewed 50 healthcare practitioners and asked them "How do you go about establishing and maintaining healing relationships with your patients? What concrete things do you do to bring this about?"

- Eight fundamental themes emerged . . .


“Eight Practitioner Skills That Promote Healing Relationships”

1. Do the little things
2. Take time and listen
3. Be open
4. Find something to like, to love
5. Remove barriers
6. Let the patient explain
7. Share authority
8. Be committed and trustworthy

Love
Hope
Joy
Forgiveness
Compassion
Faith
Awe
Gratitude

Are they really that different?

The Healer’s Art

"We thought we could cure everything, but it turns out we can only cure a small amount of human suffering. The rest of it needs to be healed."

Rachel Naomi Remen