MAINTAINING OUR HEALTH: SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Louis A. Ritz, Ph.D.
Dept of Neuroscience
UF Center for Spirituality and Health
Prelude

• “I’m trying to find someone with a profoundly quiet mind…” W. Y., MD
• “The role of a physician is to reduce her patient’s suffering…” D. S., MD
Overview

- Being in the moment
- Non-reactive, quiet mind
- Meditation and self-reflection
- A comment about addictions
- Goal - Inner and outer peace
Definitions

• **Health**: the ability to deal with the challenges of life – with a quiet mind, maintaining our inner peace

• **Spirituality**: being awake - to the present moment; 24/7 journey to our true self

• **Salutogenesis** – the factors that promote our health
  
  • Diet, exercise, not smoking
  
  • Living in the moment; Letting go; “Not reacting”; Meditation/Contemplation coupled with self-reflection
Mindfulness – Jon Kabat-Zinn

- **Mindfulness** - paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the moment, and nonjudgmentally.
- **Mindfulness Meditation** - A secular, non-esoteric, contemplative practice cultivating focused attention and self-awareness
- **Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)**
“Mindful Practice” – the recipe for patient-centered care

- To be present, not distracted by past/future
- No self-absenteeism, no automatic processing, no multi-tasking (!)
- To exhibit attentive listening
- “A sense of unfinished curiosity”
- To recognize, through developing self-reflection and self-awareness, emotional responses to the patient - factors that might cloud the decision-making process {ED-22 from LCME standards}
A Perspective on Life’s Challenges
– “Don’t react”

• Calm people, non-stressed individuals, behave differently in challenging situations
• They “don’t react” – no mental turmoil

• Two requirements for stress!
• 1) Life’s challenges
• 2) Our response
A Perspective on Life’s Challenges – “Don’t react”

- Decoupling of psychological reflex
- Mental turmoil, including stress, is to a large degree self-inflicted
- “Stress is optional!”

[Diagram showing the process of stimulus and reaction with and without mindfulness]
Effects of Practicing Mindfulness

- Physiological
  - Decrease stress levels
  - Decrease blood pressure
  - Stronger immune response to illness

- Behavior regulation
  - Lower levels of impulsivity
  - More appropriate, flexible responses to events
  - Promotes goal-setting and attainment behavior
  - Increased productivity and performance on tasks

- Psychological
  - Enhancement of self-regulated functioning
  - Promotes commitment to and achievement of goals
  - Adds clarity to current experience
  - Promotes insight

- Attentional
  - Increased attentiveness
  - Improved attentional capacity

- Emotional control
  - Increased awareness, understanding, and acceptance of emotions
  - Decrease in emotional disturbance (e.g., depression, anxiety, and stress)
  - Increased ability to correct or repair unpleasant mood states

- Interpersonal
  - Promotes connection and closeness in relationships
  - Increased communication skills
  - Increased healthy relationship functioning and enhances overall relationship quality
  - Increased empathy

- General well-being
  - Enhance coping with distress and disability in both daily living and times of extreme stress
  - Increased satisfaction with life and enhanced vitality
  - Promotes relaxation
  - Enhanced tolerance to pain
Figure 1. Determinants of Health and Their Contribution to Premature Death.
Adapted from McGinnis et al.\textsuperscript{10}
The 12-step program

• Perhaps the strongest evidence for a link between spirituality and health
• Addictions are considered, at least in part, to be biologically based diseases – requiring a spiritual intervention
• Personal transformation
• Depends on:
  • surrender a higher power (#1)
  • self-reflection and moral inventory (#4)
  • acknowledgement of weaknesses (#5)
  • prayer and meditation (#11)
  • service to others (#12)
Meditation as Medication: The Ultimate Complementary Medicine

- Stress reduction – HR, BP
- Emotions quieted
- Mental equanimity
- Spiritual connectedness, a feeling of unity (primary use!)

Inner Peace
“The ultimate aim of spiritual practices is awakening; that is, to know our true Self and our relationship to the sacred. However, spiritual practices also offer numerous other gifts along the way…

…the heart begins to open, fear and anger melt, greed and jealousy dwindle, happiness and joy grow, love flowers, peace replaces agitation, concern for others blossoms, wisdom matures, and both psychological and physical health improve… “

- Roger Walsh, MD, PhD – “Essential Spirituality”