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Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Chronic Illness

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Background

The Minnesota Department of Health (n.d.) defines a chronic health condition as having an extended course, does not resolve suddenly, and complete cure is a rarity. The literature suggests that stress can exacerbate the symptoms of chronic health condition (Roth and Robins, 2004). Addressing the biopsychosocial needs of individuals with chronic health conditions pushes the limits of conventional medicine (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). A chronic health condition, if left untreated can lead to additional physical and psychological conditions (e.g. contributing to the development of anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and helplessness) (Ledesma & Kumano, 2009); (Reibel, Greeson, Brainard, & Rosenzweig, 2001). One way to reduce stress is through the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) a program developed to address the biopsychosocial needs of an individual with chronic health conditions by providing training in meditation and yoga as an approach to stress reduction and emotion management (Bishop, 2002). Additionally, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction is an integrative approach to decrease stress and improve quality of life (Praisman, 2008).

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the modifications made to the University of Massachusetts' Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program as found in the literature and identify alternative strategies to decrease the stress of individuals suffering from specific chronic health conditions. The findings will be presented to the agency and at the Minnesota State University, Mankato Masters of Social Work Capstone Forum.

Research Question

Given the required criteria identified by key stakeholders and the researcher, which modifications to the University of Massachusetts' Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program best meets the needs of Immanuel St. Joseph's Hospital - Mayo Health System?

Methodology

A systematic review of the literature obtained from peer reviewed journals over the last 10 years was completed regarding the modifications made to the University of Massachusetts' Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program to reduce the stress that individuals with chronic health conditions experience. Key stakeholders at the agency and the researcher identified required criteria necessary for the successful implementation of a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program at Immanuel St. Joseph's - Mayo Health System. The criteria were utilized to perform a content analysis on the literature. The criteria included programs effective in rural areas, programs addressing populations at risk, group composition group facilitators' credentials, inclusion of outcomes, and chronic illnesses.

Findings																							
Chronic Illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Fibromyalgia o Rheumatoid Arthritis o Anxiety Disorders o Cancer o Mood Disorders o Cardiovascular Disease o Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) o Chronic Pain The most commonly cited chronic illness was Cancer.																						
Rural Area	None																						
Group Composition	Women 81% Male 19% Average Age 49.6-years-old																						
Group Facilitator Credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Professionally Trained MBSR Instructors o Certified MBSR Teachers o Psychiatrist and Meditation Specialist o Instructor not certified in Western Tradition of MBSR, but lived and studied in Buddhist Monasteries and trained in leading MBSR courses in medical/academic settings o Psychiatric Nurse Specialist-professional training under Jon Kabat-Zinn o Clinic Psychologist and Registered Nurse with professional yoga training and taught MBSR for 8-10 years 																						
Outcome of Studies	<p>Cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Improved Quality of Life o Increased Coping o Immune System Benefits o Decreased Overall Stress/Anxiety o Decreased Mood Disturbances o Decreased Anger o Increased Vigor o More Refreshed Sleep <p>Anxiety and Mood Disorder</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Reduction in Rumination o Reduction in Affective Symptoms o Reduction in Dysfunctional Attitudes o Reduction in Anxiety o Reduction in Depression <p>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o No Significant Changes were Found for Psychological, Endocrine, or Functional Health Variables <p>Chronic Pain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Greater Quality of Life Profile for Chronically Ill o Reduced Depression o Reduced Somatic Complaints o Increased Ability to Cope with Pain and Anxiety <p>Cardiovascular Disease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Decreased Anxiety Score o Increase in Health-Related Quality of Life o Reduced Physical Symptoms o Decreased Psychological Distress 																						
Intervention	<p>Number of Weeks</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>6 Weeks</td><td>5%</td></tr> <tr><td>7 Weeks</td><td>10%</td></tr> <tr><td>8 Weeks</td><td>85%</td></tr> </table> <p>Homework</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>80%</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>20%</td></tr> </table> <p>Retreat</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>60%</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>40%</td></tr> </table> <p>Number of Hours</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>1 Hour</td><td>5%</td></tr> <tr><td>1.5 Hours</td><td>35%</td></tr> <tr><td>2 Hours</td><td>15%</td></tr> <tr><td>2.5 Hours</td><td>45%</td></tr> </table>	6 Weeks	5%	7 Weeks	10%	8 Weeks	85%	Yes	80%	No	20%	Yes	60%	No	40%	1 Hour	5%	1.5 Hours	35%	2 Hours	15%	2.5 Hours	45%
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Conclusion and Recommendation

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction has demonstrated preliminary effectiveness in addressing a wide variety of physical and psychological symptoms that often accompany a chronic illness. Immanuel St. Joseph's - Mayo Health System should proceed with caution when implementing a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program with specific chronic illnesses including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Fibromyalgia, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Cardiovascular Disease, and those individuals experiencing an acute episode of an Anxiety or Mood Disorder as there is limited research to support the effectiveness of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction when working with these populations.

The recommendation for Immanuel St. Joseph's-Mayo Health System for Future Implementation of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction with Individuals who have Chronic Illnesses Includes.

- o The literature reviewed suggest that this would be a beneficial program to aid those affected by chronic illnesses by addressing the physical and psychological effects of stress that are often associated with chronic illnesses.
- o Outcomes remained positive despite modifications to the original Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (reduction in homework time, weeks met, and session time).
- o The Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction needs to be altered to meet the needs of the individuals affected by chronic illnesses.

Limitations/Barriers

Although there are many promising findings related to Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Chronic Illnesses, unfortunately there are a limited number of peer reviewed findings, thus continued research needs to be conducted. Additionally, the type of research needs to be strengthened with more use of control groups and increased number of study participants. Also a limited number of studies completed follow-up, so it is uncertain whether the gains the participants experienced during the studied were maintained over time. Pertaining to the criteria that was originally set out: No research studies were found to be completed in a rural area. Additionally, a majority of the participants in the 20 studies reviewed were middle-aged women. These limitations reduce the generalizability of the findings to urban areas and middle-aged women.

Implications of Social Work Practice

Continued research is needed to maintain Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction as an evidence-based practice. Additionally, the social work community needs education regarding this program and its applications with chronic illnesses so that social workers are able to refer clients to this type of program if deemed appropriate.

References

References are available upon request from the author.