

CASE STUDY: LIFE HAPPENS – MINDFULNESS WORKSHOPS AT NHS NORTH WEST

'Life Happens: managing yourself mindfully at work and home' consisted of two full days, a fortnight apart, and took place during February 2013 at the Manchester offices of NHS North West (NHS NW). The course was commissioned to assist NHS NW staff cope with any stress they felt due to the transition of services, which was completed in March 2013.

Thirty one people attended day one and nineteen attended day two, fourteen of whom had attended the first workshop. Of those who attended both workshops differences in their Perceived Stress Scale scores and their Day-to-Day Experiences Questionnaire scores were compared. The majority found the course beneficial in reducing stress and improving their day to day experiences, as measured on

validated scales. Subjecting the data to a chi squared test showed the differences were statistically significant for the Day-to-Day Experience scores, indicating strong evidence of improvement.

Key Outcomes

All attendees were asked to complete the Cohen Perceived Stress Scale and the Day-to-Day Experiences Questionnaire at the beginning of the first session and the end of the second session. All attendees also were requested to complete a course evaluation sheet. The results of the questionnaires gave the following outcomes:

- 54% day one attendees came with high stress levels as calculated through the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)
- 14 NHS employees attended both workshops, although not all completed the questionnaires twice, as requested. However of the 10 that completed the PSS twice 60% showed a reduction in their stress after the second workshop.
- 50% of those who reduced their stress reduced it from a high score to an average or below average score.
- using the Day-to-Day Experiences Questionnaire, 86% who completed the questionnaire, reported better or similar scores after the second workshop
- on average there was a 10% improvement in the Day-to-Day Experiences Questionnaire scores
- the improvements in the PSS were not statistically significant and a larger cohort would be recommended for further investigation
- the improvements in the Day-to-Day Experiences scores were statistically significant, despite the small sample. Also known as the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) it measures open or receptive awareness of and attention to what is taking place in the present
- correlational, quasi-experimental, and laboratory studies have shown that the MAAS taps a unique quality of consciousness that is related to, and predictive of, a variety of self-regulation and wellbeing constructs

The following are the aggregation of the scores for the two days on the appropriateness of the intervention:

- 96% rated the course content as very good or excellent



- 94% rated the delivery as very good or excellent
- 90% rated the course material as very good or excellent
- 77% agreed or strongly agreed that the course met their needs
- 77% agreed or strongly agreed that they would use the skills learnt on the course in their workplace
- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the course to a colleague

Comments on what the attendees found most useful included:

- *'The stress reduction part was excellent'*
- *'The breathing techniques I will definitely use these to help my anxiety'*
- *'The section about the causes of stress in the workplace and how to respond rather than react. I related to the causes and instantly recognised the benefit that breathing before responding would make'*
- *'The self-care part'*
- *'Relating practice to the workplace'*

Background

NHS NW was the Strategic Health Authority for the North West, and as part of the transition in NHS services were closed at the end of March 2013. NHS NW was based in Central Manchester, with around four hundred and twenty employees. Many of those employed were redeployed into the new organisations within the Manchester workplace, however some staff faced redundancy and others relocation.

The substantial changes in the NHS during 2012/13 created uncertainty of employment for many NHS NW staff. Transition was a lengthy process and some staff faced an extended period of stress, sometimes with increased workload as colleagues found other positions. The internal Health and Work Group identified the need for an intervention to improve the mental wellbeing of staff and identified mindfulness training as an ideal intervention.

Mindfulness training is gathering extensive support in the health, medical and wellbeing sectors with a rapidly growing evidence base. The benefits of mindfulness meditation are known to be widespread, being used and evaluated in areas such as stress reduction, depression, anxiety, health-related symptoms, parenting and relationships. It is also now growing support for use in the workplace setting both amongst staff in general as well as with leaders.

Key Aims

The aim of the training was to help individuals place their lives within a context, engage in observing their thoughts, actions and responses and how these might help or hinder them in their reactions, approach and the choices that they make. It emphasised how we can bring choice and perspective into the way in which we deal with life's events and challenges

It looked to provide individuals with an additional set of

skills, including resilience and resourcefulness, which could be applied within the workplace, as well as in other contexts, such as at home and in relationships.

An emphasis was placed on dealing with stress and uncertainty in the workplace and how this impacts on absenteeism, motivation and work satisfaction. In addition there was focus on using mindfulness as a means of managing life in difficult and good times as well as on how these skills can extend far beyond the work environment.

Key Stages of Setup

The course was commissioned on behalf of the Health and Work Group through the Public Health Team and the Department of Health, as experts within this area. Attendees were recruited through the NHS NW weekly email newsletter and directly through distributing flyers and face-to-face discussions on the event across the different departments. All attendees were self-referrals.

The space for the course was donated by the building management company and allowed for up to fifty places to be filled. Once the in-house places had been taken remaining spaces were offered, through NHS health and wellbeing leads, to trusts within the NW as a taster session for their organisations.

How It Works

The course content included discussion on mindfulness, its background, benefits and uses. It outlined the 'Life Happens' model (Mindfulness-based Multi-dynamic Therapy) which includes the three components of the biopsychosocial model, psychological concepts and mindfulness philosophy and practices. There was a balanced mix of presentation, discussion and mindfulness practice.



Areas looked at in detail included:

- the body's response to stress, both physiologically and psychologically
- the impact it has on our health and wellbeing
- the breathing mechanism and its importance as this is a key factor in mindfulness work and stress reduction

- how to implement mindfulness practices into the workplace, at home and into your life as part of self-care
- discussions on developing resilience and resourcefulness through mindfulness
- suggestions on managing work and life issues in a mindful way

Course attendees were given three questionnaires to complete, the first to assess the appropriateness of the intervention, a Perceived Stress Scale and a Day to Day Experiences Questionnaire. Each was relatively short, although not all attendees completed the questionnaires the majority did.

The second day of the course, as well as demonstrating further practices, provided the opportunity to learn how to implement practices into work and home life.

Resources

The funding for the course was provided by NHS NW strategic human resources, from a regional NHS staff health and wellbeing budget. The room was donated and the floor mats lent at no charge from a local Buddhist centre. Attendees were asked to bring their own lunch, whilst refreshments throughout the day were provided by Third Wave community engagement. The initiative was also supported by the Food and Drink Administration (FDA) and Managers in Health Partnership (MHIP) and a pop up learning centre was run on the day, providing the opportunity to pick up free literature and purchase related resources.

All attendees received a free CD following the first day containing the mindfulness practices demonstrated on the course, to allow them to practise the techniques between the two courses.

Key Challenges

- Securing attendance on the course, due to the work pressures on staff within NHS NW at the time of transition. Multiple communication mechanisms were utilised including newsletter articles, posters and direct invitations.
- Securing attendance over two days was difficult for many individuals and only 14 attendees went to both courses, limiting the evaluation of the completed course

Key Learning

Mindfulness is both appropriate and effective as a work-based intervention to improve mental wellbeing and provide individuals with additional tools to cope with change and uncertainty. The majority of participants reported positive effects from attending the workshops both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Of those where there was a measurable positive effect, there was a large amount of variance, which may have been due to

some participants actively listening to the audio mindfulness practices between the two sessions and others implementing some of the philosophy and concepts of the workshop without actually listening to the guided practices. However, further investigation would be required to ascertain specific reasons for this.

The mix of presentations on the evidence base and physiology of the effect of meditation were well received, and anecdotally lent credence to the practices that the attendees were led through.

Further comments on the feedback forms identified that wider discussion and assistance on how attendees sustain mindfulness in the workplace would have been useful, and that further assistance to develop practice would also have been appreciated. Some of the issues were raised at the end of the second day and indicate the desire for continuing support to assist individuals to embed mindfulness within their office/workplace.

Sustainability

Following transition a new forum for supporting health and wellbeing in the Manchester office is being developed and it is hoped that this will form the conduit to further promote and roll out mindfulness practice.

The NHS Trusts in the North West will be offering taster sessions in mindfulness for their staff and it is hoped that, in this way, other NHS organisations will develop awareness of the benefits of the practice for improving mental wellbeing.

Next Steps

- The new NHS organisations based in Manchester are currently coming together to pool resources for health and wellbeing. It is envisaged that mindfulness will be an element of the offer to staff
- The installation of Just a Moment software, to prompt staff to take a mindful minute is being implemented
- NHS organisations within the North West will be supported to host mindfulness taster sessions

For more information contact:

Libby Sedgley
Senior Programme Manager
Health Education North West
Libby.Sedgley@nw.hee.nhs.uk
0161 625 7772

Cheryl Rezek
c.rezek@btinternet.com