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Book Review: Mindful Medical Practitioners: A Guide for Clinicians and Educators

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Olivia Tse

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Article abstract

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Book Review: *Mindful Medical Practitioners: A Guide for Clinicians and Educators*

Revue de livre : *Mindful Medical Practitioners: A Guide for Clinicians and Educators*

Olivia Tse¹

¹McGill University, Quebec, Canada

Correspondence to: Olivia Tse, MDCM; email: olivia.tse@mcgill.ca

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Abstract

The authors of *Mindful Medical Practitioners: A Guide for Clinicians and Educators*, Patricia Lynn Dobkin and Craig Stephen Hassed, experienced teachers of mindfulness, describe in detail how mindfulness is being taught to medical students, residents and practicing professionals in their respective settings. The book provides guidance and addresses potential questions for clinicians and educators who wish to develop and integrate programs to teach mindfulness within their institutions. It is an invaluable resource that is informative, comprehensive and readable.

Medical institutions have recently placed an emphasis on student, resident and faculty well-being and resilience, through promotion of self-care, self-awareness and mindfulness.

Individual presentations and brief workshops on mindfulness within the setting of medical education provide an introduction, but meaningful and ongoing guidance in cultivating mindfulness for personal transformation and for enhancing the quality of patient care requires the incorporation of a longitudinal curriculum. Recognizing the need is but the impetus for developing such a program.

Résumé

Les auteurs de *Mindful Medical Practitioners : A Guide for Clinicians and Educators* (la pleine conscience chez le médecin : un guide pour les cliniciens et les éducateurs), Patricia Lynn Dobkin et Craig Stephen Hassed, des enseignants expérimentés de la pleine conscience, décrivent en détail la manière dont elle est enseignée aux étudiants en médecine, aux résidents et aux professionnels en exercice dans leurs contextes respectifs. Ils offrent des conseils et ils abordent des questions pertinentes pour les cliniciens et les éducateurs qui souhaitent élaborer et intégrer un programme d'enseignement de la pleine conscience au sein de leurs institutions. Il s'agit d'une ressource inestimable qui est informative, complète et facile à lire.

*Mindful Medical Practitioners: A Guide for Clinicians and Educators*¹ by Patricia Lynn Dobkin and Craig Stephen Hassed provides guidance for such a task. It describes in detail how mindfulness is being taught to medical students, residents and practicing professionals including how programs are organized and integrated into these curricula.

Patricia Dobkin, a clinical psychologist, and Craig Hassed, a physician, are educators, authors, researchers and innovators of mindfulness teaching at their own universities. They have taught courses and workshops on mindfulness to thousands of medical students, residents, physicians and allied healthcare professionals. This book

was written in response to a question posed by many of their course participants: “How can we start a program to teach mindfulness in our medical setting?”

Practical, thorough, methodical and logically presented, the book first addresses the primary question: why teach mindfulness? Are there benefits for the trainee, for the physician, for their patients; and what is the evidence supporting said benefits?

Chapters 2 and 3 include an overview of the research on the application of mindfulness to illness and disease, to practitioner well-being, and to enhancing the quality of patient care. As well, there is a subsection on the very interesting, emerging research on the neuroscience of meditation.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide the insights and pragmatic steps involved in starting and delivering a program. They begin with detailed descriptions of programs from three medical schools where mindfulness has been integrated into the core medical education curricula. They offer insight into the contextual complexities of developing the respective programs with each section individually authored by the physicians who were involved from inception to integration. In addition, there are brief but helpful descriptions of programs for postgraduate trainees and faculty members.

Chapter 7 deals with educating and training teachers to teach effectively and authentically. The ‘who’ of the teacher, the teaching skills, and the program delivery are stressed. A teacher must have a deep understanding of mindfulness and must also embody its qualities in order to effectively guide participants to develop self-awareness and insight. The process is illustrated with the analysis of a conversation between teacher and student (including authors’ commentaries regarding teaching insights) and with further elaboration on the skills of inquiry. The teacher and the teacher’s skills are paramount to the success of a program, that is, the transformation of a participant into a self-aware, mindful practitioner.

The final chapter argues that change in the culture of medicine requires transformation and influence at the leadership level (top-down) in parallel with change at the

individual level (bottom-up). The authors display their extensive knowledge of world-wide developments in mindfulness and healthcare with the description of two model programs where institutional leadership incorporated mindfulness to improve the culture of the workplace.

The book concludes with a reminder that mindfulness is not a panacea and that its practice may not be beneficial for everyone. Readers are also warned to beware of the erroneous and superficial forms of mindfulness that have been exploited by some enterprises for commercial gain.

Four years ago, as a neophyte in the world of mindfulness and postgraduate medical education, I read this book with a true ‘don’t know’ mind. It was very helpful to me then, the detailed information from the undergraduate setting being applicable to the postgraduate setting, and also continues to inform my work today. The insights, along with the multiple references provided, remain relevant.

*Mindful Medical Practitioners: A Guide for Clinicians and Educators*¹ is an invaluable resource. I would highly recommend it to anyone inclined to develop a mindfulness-based program for healthcare professionals at a clinical or teaching institution. Readable, relevant, detailed in its brevity and yet comprehensive, it includes a framework of everything you want to know about developing and integrating a mindfulness curriculum into an educational setting.

Dobkin’s and Hassed’s intention is to raise interest, to inform, and to address potential questions with regard to how to integrate mindfulness into clinical work and medical education, and to be a guide and resource for those qualified to teach it. They have succeeded.

Reference

1. Dobkin PL, Hassed CS. *Mindful Medical Practitioners: A guide for clinicians and educators*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Press; 2016.