Complementary and alternative medicine for wellness: Burnout prevention for ourselves and our community

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Introduction

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to identify students in various modalities of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) available in the Worcester area. Students used the resources they learned to achieve a Wellness Week at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. These resources will also help students develop techniques for addressing burnout in the medical profession.

Modality: There are many modalities of CAM. We chose 5 that resonated with us most during the population clerkship.

1. Acupuncture
2. Music Therapy
3. Meditation
4. Yoga
5. Massage Therapy

In a separate study involving music therapy and pediatric oncology patients, (http://www.musictherapy.org/about/musictherapy/) providing an outlet for expression of feelings, music therapy was used within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of children. Music therapy supports its effectiveness in many areas such as: overall physical rehabilitation and facilitating movement, maximizing motivation to become engaged in their treatment, providing emotional support for clients and their families, and providing an outlet for expression of feelings. (http://www.musictherapy.org/about/musictherapy/)

Acupuncture

- Major constituent of traditional Chinese medicine that has been practiced for thousands of years (NCCIH, 2007)
- Practitioners use needles to penetrate the skin at specific points on the body
- Widely used for chronic pain conditions including cancer, lower back pain, neuromas, neck pain, and headaches (Nahin et al., 2016; NCCIH, 2007)
- Studies suggest that acupuncture is safe when practiced properly and can improve chronic pain (Nahin et al., 2016; Paley et al., 2015; NCCIH 2007)

Yoga

- Origin: Origin of the word, yoga, means a state of unity, balance, and mental control to practice the mind and body.
- Practice: The practice of yoga includes physical, mental, and spiritual aspects, as well as breathing exercises. In 2015, the National Health Interview Survey found that six percent of adults used yoga for its health benefits in the previous 12 months.
- Yoga has been studied in many different functional health benefits including increasing range of motion, mobility and flexibility in the body. It is a most unique quality of incorporating both movement and meditation has been shown to reduce anxiety and stress reduction. In a 2019 study, the combination of yoga poses and supine rest in cyclic meditation decreased state of anxiety and increased memory scores more than in a classical yoga relaxation posture alone (Subramanya et al., 2009).

Meditation

- Meditation encompasses a large variety of mind and body practices that increase physical relaxation and improve psychological well-being. These techniques often focus on integrating mindfulness and meditation into daily life.
- Meditation comes in many different forms, but most have these common elements:
  - Practiced in a quiet location with minimal distractions
  - Comfortable posture
  - Specific focus of attention
  - Occasional (usually between comes and go without judgment)

Research on meditation has yielded numerous benefits on health:
- Pain reduction
- Blood pressure reduction
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Mental health benefits – meditation has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia. There is also significant evidence for using meditation to aid with smoking cessation
- In the context of cancer, meditation is especially helpful, since increased stress, anxiety, depression and pain are common symptoms from either the cancer itself or treatment. Amidst our opioid crisis, it is also extremely important to further understand the mental health benefits of meditation as an alternative means to treat pain without pharmacological intervention.

References

- Moving forward, it is important for medical providers to have an open mind about integrating CAM in addition to traditional western treatments. Physicians increasingly recognize that patients use complementary therapies, but many are reluctant to approach the subject. Having a discussion about CAM treatments with patients may enhance the relationship between the physician and patient and improve compliance with conventional treatment. (Corbin, 2005) The Simonds-Hurd Complementary Care Center joined with UMass Memorial Health Alliance Hospital in Fitchburg provides a wonderful model of how complementary care, including massage, can be integrated. The Healing Gardens in Harvard, Mass., offers a variety of CAM for cancer patients such as yoga, music therapy, meditation, and so much more. Medical providers are knowledgeable about complementary treatments offered and refer patients to treatment right there in the hospital, which is beneficial to their patients can benefit from. The collaboration between traditional and alternative medical providers is unique and remarkable. A model is something that all hospitals should strive towards in the future.