Mind-Body Medicine and UNC Rehabilitation: A Ten-Year Commitment

At the UNC Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, providing an ideal setting for mind-body medicine is a tenet of our philosophy. This is because many of the illnesses and conditions which are the focus of our practice—such as chronic pain, musculoskeletal and neurological problems, and mental health issues—are undertreated, associated with high sick calls, missed diagnosis, and poor outcome measures. Because Dr. Moura’s program offers a variety of mind-body techniques to help manage these illnesses, it is an ideal setting for Dr. Moura’s work.

“Returning troops see a measurable and significant reduction in headache frequency and severity among the soldiers who engage in mindfulness training, compared to the control group,” Dr. Ford notes. “This offers an indication of the importance which, through my training, I place on the status of mind-body medicine and rehabilitation. This interrelationship is the utmost concern in the treatment of every patient.”

“When patients come to Dr. Park burdened by depression, for example, his goal is to try to identify the root cause of the problem. ‘They always want to feel better,’ he relates. ‘This often gives them a great sense of calming and comforting reassurance. At the same time, I’m feeling the temperature of their hands. I’m always observing those who are anxious and depressed are usually cold.”

He then looks at their face, complexion and lips. “Often their abdomen is also cold if they have depression, and their abdomen is also cold if they have anxiety.” When patients come to Dr. Park burdened by depression, for example, his goal is to try to identify the root cause of the problem. ‘They always want to feel better,’ he relates. ‘This often gives them a great sense of calming and comforting reassurance. At the same time, I’m feeling the temperature of their hands. I’m always observing those who are anxious and depressed are usually cold.”

As the ranking descends, the doctor who uses acupuncture is ‘the doctor who heals both the patient’s soul and mind.’ The second rank goes to ‘the doctor who heals the patient with the food that patient takes daily.’ ‘Of course, the patient is the one who heals the patient with the food that patient takes daily.’

Mind-Body Medicine can help the whole patient. Other faculty members in PM&R continue to expand Dr. Le’s vision of incorporating mind-body medicine as well as other mind-body techniques into practice.

The Mind Body Skills Group Course and Related Research

Vera Moura, MD, has engaged in her 10-week Mind-Body Skills Group (MBSG) training to help healthcare professionals at UNC since 2006, while also collecting data to study the effectiveness of the program on patients with stress, mindfulness, and spirituality. She recently began to offer her program, which is a meditative group process, to the general public. She also has applied for grants to teach these skills to rehabilitation patients in particular, including geriatric patients.

Original research, centered around the experience of mindfulness training for a variety of chronic stress-related illnesses, continues to draw participants engaging in mindfulness training. Because Dr. Moura’s program offers a variety of mind-body techniques to help manage these illnesses, it is an ideal setting for Dr. Moura’s work. Each group member is taught to practice one or more of the mind-body techniques depending on their needs and thereby experience the effectiveness of these techniques.

Returning troops see a measurable and significant reduction in headache frequency and severity among the soldiers who engage in mindfulness training, compared to the control group, notes Dr. Ford. “This offers an indication of the importance of integrating mindfulness training into the depart- ment’s residency program curriculum, so that aspiring physicians keep all options in mind for their patients, now and in the future.”