



## RCN International Research Conference 2019

Using mindfulness training to mitigate workplace stress  
and burnout risk for nurses and staff during mandated  
organizational change.

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# Introducing the Context...



- Saskatchewan: 1.1 million people in 652,000 km<sup>2</sup> (almost 3x size of UK)
- Two major urban centres (total 500K population, 6 hospitals)
- Large rural & remote areas with smaller towns as access points for health care services
- Air/ground ambulance services
- Saskatchewan Health Authority has 40,000 employees in 270 facilities

# Background

- Early 2018: Major health system change mandated by government: Amalgamation of 13 local health regions into 1 provincial region
  - Significant source of stress for staff & much uncertainty as a result
- Additional ongoing work stressors: Staff shortages, greater numbers of increasingly high acuity patients, risk of funding cutbacks...
  - Another policy change: Family members at bedside 24/7 now possible
- (Former) Saskatoon Health Region's workplace wellness office instituted a free online mindfulness program in hopes of reducing workplace stress
  - Program currently being rolled out province-wide via intranet site

# Aims of Research

- Preliminary results from evaluation of a mindfulness program
  - Evaluate interest & uptake of online programming for stress reduction
  - Discuss early findings related to nursing practice & workplace issues
  
- Program: 30-day online mindfulness program (provided free of charge) for all employees of the former local health region
  - Daily guided exercises: Brief introduction to exercise, time for practice, review
  - Minimum of once-a-day with exercise time averaging about 10 minutes
  - Introductory practices including body scans, breath training, re-orient thoughts
  - Daily reminders sent by email/text, “Buddy system” encouraged but optional

# Method: Overview & Participants

- Self-selecting participation via online survey or in-person interview
  - Vendor already selected & program underway when study started
  - Initial survey & interviews ran from May – December 2018 (8 months)
- Mix of open and closed-response quantitative & qualitative questions
  - Online survey: 10-15 minutes; In-person interview: 20-30 minutes
- Recruitment from health system intranet & flyers at Saskatoon hospitals
- Participants: N=87, 85% female/15% male, 77% univ. degree or higher
- Areas: Administration 26%, Allied Health 36% (Therapies, Pharmacy, etc.), Nursing 33% (RNs & LPNs), Support Staff 5% (Dietary, Janitorial, etc.)

# Method: Challenges & Limitations

- Self-selecting population, may not have reached those who were less positive about the program or those who dropped out
  - Access to participant information from online vendor was not possible
  
- Not able to assess pre-participation stress levels, mental health concerns, or workplace concerns which may impact on personal experience
  
- Participant recruitment challenges (87 of about 600 participants: 14.5%)
  - Strong preference for online survey format over in-person interview
  - Online survey format: “Quantity (length) vs quality” always a challenge
  - Qualitative & quantitative analysis ongoing (relaunched- additional respondents)



# Results: Facilitators & Positive Aspects

- 77% expressed interest in continuing a workplace-based practice
  - In-person sessions: 45%, Online: 43%, Library: 36%, App: 55% (multiple responses)
- In describing how the program impacted on their professional lives...
  - “[It helps me] re-focus and practice calmness in a not so calm career.”
- In describing the program’s effects in their personal lives...
  - “I feel calmer and have more patience. I see beauty around me more often.”
- Main effects reported: Decreased stress and anxiety, increased coping skills, better mental focus, better sleep, & increased tolerance with challenging situations and people (both at work & at home)



# Results: Barriers & Practice Issues

- 68% said that a lack of time during the day was a major barrier to practice
  - “Unable to fully engage or follow through with exercises due to heavy workload.”
- 72% reported the inability to keep to a regular practice schedule, often linked to rotating shift work patterns
  - “Shift work, [being] on call causes disruption [and I am] unable to attend [to] a particular practice.”
  - “Time is the biggest issue as my availability can be unpredictable.”
- 16% had participated in multiple rounds (2 or more) of the online program as a way of facilitating their practice while at work
  - “Would like to take [it] again to get into the habit of practicing mindfulness.”





# Conclusions

- Interest in the continued use of work-facilitated mindfulness programming
  - Some participants reporting it was easier to do this at work than at home
  - “[These] practices assist in bringing a sense of peace and calm to my life and the benefits have been seen not only by myself but by all those around me.”
  
- Difficulty in being able to participate in scheduled in-person sessions
  - Prefer drop-in sessions or online content due to work demands/scheduling
  
- Interest in content being tailored more to specific workplace stressors experienced by staff in a health care setting
  - Developing a program with tailored content for trial later this year (2019-20)

# Discussion: Issues & Questions

- Is there a need to develop more tailored programming for nurses & the specific clinical issues they face at work?
  - Is there a need to focus on resiliency & coping skills overall?
  - Are there certain areas of practice where this would be more beneficial?
  
- Should nurses have mindfulness training as a part of their nursing education programming?
  - Should this include training specific to challenging situations & clients?
  
- What course format would be easiest for nurses to access?
  - Online, in-person scheduled or drop-in, unit-specific or open to all...?

# Thank you for listening!

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