Stress and Physician/Patient Communication : The Evidence Behind Mindfulness for "Unintentional Inattention"

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

I have no conflicts and nothing to disclose

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- Working Memory Capacity (WMC)
- Selective Attention
  - Orienting
  - Conflict Monitoring
- "Cold" and "Hot" cognitive demands
- Inattentional Blindness/Deafness
- Communication
- Mindfulness Practice

Brief Overview

Working Memory Capacity (WMC)

- Refers to the "capacity to selectively maintain and manipulate goal-relevant information without getting distracted by irrelevant information over short intervals" (Jha, Rogers, and Morrison, 2014, p. 348).
- Individual differences in WMC

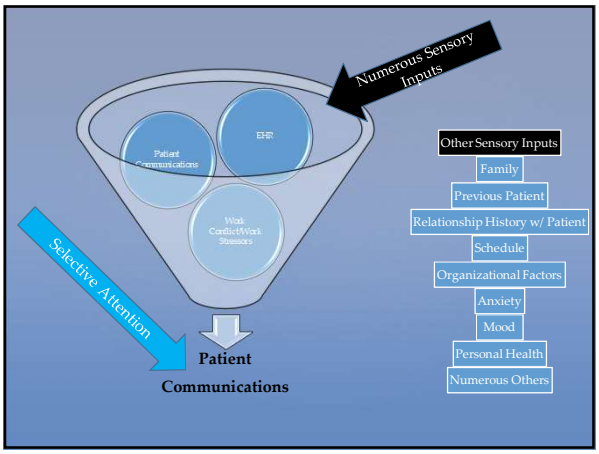
WMC

- WMC includes:
  1. "Attentional processes to select information and appropriate behavioral responses"
  2. "Memory-related processes to maintain information in an active, easily accessible form so that task-relevant information can be manipulated in the service of current goals"

(Jha, Rogers, and Morrison, 2014, p. 348).

Selective Attention

- Process of directing our awareness to relevant stimuli while ignoring irrelevant stimuli
- Selective attention allows us to tune "into" relevant stimuli and tune "out" irrelevant/insignificant stimuli in service of moment-to-moment goals/tasks
- Important in that there is a limit to how much information can be processed at a given time



- Selective Attention is involved in:
  1. Orienting
  2. Conflict Monitoring

Selective Attention

- Cold Cognitive Demands
  - Emotionally neutral, analytical, requires comprehending, inferring, thinking in reasoned and rational ways (MCAT questions; gathering data for a diagnosis)
- Hot Cognitive Demands
  - Mental content that is emotionally valenced or laden (excessive demands at work; dysfunctional organizational relationships; family crisis/difficulties; chronic stressors)

"Cold" and "Hot" Cognitive Demands

Cold" and "Hot" Cognitive Demands

- Higher WMC is correlated with greater success dealing with "Cold" cognitive Demands
- Individuals with lower WMC tend to have more emotionally intrusive thoughts, less success suppressing positive and negative emotions, difficulty with emotion suppression and reappraisal tasks (Brewin & Smart, 2005; Schmeichel, Volokhov, & Demaree, 2008).
- "WMC corresponds to an individual's success at intentionally guiding behavior while overcoming cognitive or affective (cold or hot) challenges, distractions, and conditioned response tendencies" (Jha, Rogers, and Morrison, 2014, p. 348).

Inattentional Blindness/Deafness

- "The inability … to recover any information from unattended sensory stimuli and is thought to be part of an important cognitive mechanism, namely that of focusing or 'concentrating' on a task to be performed."

(Encyclopedia of Neuroscience, 2009, Editors: Marc D. Binder, Nobutaka Hirokawa, Uwe Windhorst)

Mindfulness is NOT!

- Magic!
- A Panacea!
- A breathing exercise
- Clearing the Mind
- Escaping emotions

What is Mindfulness?

- *Present Focused Awareness* & *Attention*, and *Remembering*
- Remembering involves *developing the intention to be aware*
- Also includes,
  - Non-judgment
  - Acceptance
  - Kindness and friendliness (to a person, attitude, problem, etc.)
- Formal & Informal Practice(s)
- It Is Purposely Attending to Whatever is Occurring in your field of Experience (Open Monitoring—OM) or to Something Specific (Focused Attention—FA)
- Being Aware of Being Aware!
- Tending to your Attention!
- Intentional Remembering!

How is it Helpful?

When to Practice

- During the Workday
  - To start the day
  - Between Patients
  - When with Patients
  - During Breaks/Lunch
- When not at work
  - After waking/Before bed
  - In relationships (to self, other, problem(s), issue(s), etc.)
  - When eating
  - Exercising
  - Doing anything!

"You cannot not communicate. Every behavior is a kind of communication. Because behavior does not have a counterpart (there is no anti-behavior), it is not possible not to communicate."

(Paul Watzlawick, Psychologist)

Physician/Patient Relationship

"It is difficult to imagine how any behavior in the presence of another person can avoid being a communication of one's own view of the nature of one's relationship with that person and how it can fail to influence that person."

(Paul Watzlawick, Psychologist)

Physician/Patient Relationship: Mindful Presence vs. Distracted Absence

Time for more Practice!

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