

Mind Full, or Mindful?

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Being Mindful of the Carers

Introduction

"Mindfulness is both a skill and a way of living. It is about living in the here and now rather than being caught in the past or worrying all the time about the future¹."

Approximately two thirds of people with dementia in the UK are cared for in the community by family members^{2,3}. Many of these carers report experiencing much stress and have a high incidence of depression, finding it challenging to leave the home and their loved one leading to social isolation, physical and mental health problems. Many studies highlight the need to support carers in caring for themselves physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually⁴.

Mindfulness practice was originally developed in the East Asia and has strong correlations to meditation practices. The most recent and frequently cited method of mindfulness training was developed by Jon Kabat Zinn in the late 1970's and encourages the user to focus upon the present moment without judgement, and showing kindness to themselves with "more balance and resilience at work and home⁵."

Aim of Project

This project sought to determine whether Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)⁶ is an appropriate and beneficial support tool to improve the health and wellbeing, personal respect and dignity of carers of persons with dementia by enabling them to employ coping strategies in response to the challenges of the caring role.

Methodology

The programme was run over a six month period and delivered to eight carers within Argyll and Bute CHP. Potential participants were identified from existing carer roles of people with dementia known to the community dementia team and selection to the project was opt-in. Sessions were delivered weekly for 8 weeks and thereafter participants were offered fortnightly and monthly maintenance sessions. Audio recorded semi-structured one-to-one interviews were carried out at baseline in order to explore the perceptions of how caring affects the participants health and wellbeing. Upon the conclusion of the MBCT programme (month 6) further interviews were undertaken to examine the perceptions of the participants of how mindfulness has influenced their health and well-being.

Analysis

Initial results showed that as a result of the caring role carers felt a sense of loss of the relationship and it difficult to make time to enjoy previous activities without feeling they were "snatching time" to do so. Upon completion of the MBCT programme carers recognised the benefits of applying mindfulness practices to their daily routine, which have been beneficial to not only their health and wellbeing but has also had an effect upon their caring role. By applying mindfulness to daily life and routine participants have felt able to value themselves and their role more and extend kindness towards themselves and their cared for person.

All the participants lived and cared for their relative/partner in their home. Only two of the participants had previously engaged with or had an awareness of mindfulness. Seven participants completed the programme.

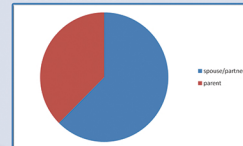
Gender of participants



Length of time as carer



Person cared for



Now I'm starting to look after me. I think the being kind to myself. You have to care for yourself because if you end up ill you can't care for the person you're caring for.

I think maybe I've got a little bit more patience. A little bit more tolerant. I think it's because I don't get so angry about things. And the coping strategies that I've picked up doing the mindfulness, that's really helped and I can see how it's really empowering.

I often feel that I'm just on this treadmill and I'm going round and round and I'm just carrying on and I can't seem to get off of it. So it's kind of taking that leap of faith just to kind of step off and you know, be good to yourself, be kind to yourself.

I think in the way that I do feel I can step back from situations a bit more which is really good. I think I'm much better at trying to remain in the present and not worrying about things in the future so much, and just treasuring moments with Dad.

If I'm feeling at all frustrated, I will do the breathing exercise, even if it's only a minute or two. And I can be on my own and just do it and then carry on and then that moment's gone.

I wasn't sleeping well my mind was obviously just thinking what am I doing tomorrow, what have I done today? How am I going to manage when we go away? And I've said to myself you're not going to solve anything lying here at night and I've tried to do the 40 minute meditation that worked for me.

I hope to keep the mindfulness going forever which is really like a huge challenge but I really want to do it because I know it will benefit me and my family.

Project Team:

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