

Presentation III: Mindfulness: Its application in pain management and the improvement of the quality of life

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“I can’t cope with this”, “Why me?”, “What if it worsens?”. These thoughts swirl in our mind when we are in pain. Soon we feel anxiety, stress, depression, irritability and exhaustion, which amplify the pain.

Suffering occurs on two levels. Firstly, there are the actual unpleasant sensations felt in the body (Primary Suffering) as a result of an injury, and ongoing illness or changes to the nervous system. On top of this is the Secondary Suffering, which is made up of all the thoughts, feelings, and emotions associated with the pain. When we are in pain, we actually feel is a fusion of both.

UK is moving towards a more holistic approach to pain management, referring many patients to alternative programs including Mindfulness. With Mindfulness, people are in a better position to distinguish what causes their pain, dissolve the Secondary Suffering and, many times, see Primary Suffering to diminish.

Mindfulness meditation was initially brought into clinical healthcare in 1979 by Prof. Jon Kabat-Zinn. He developed the MBSR program at the University of Massachusetts and since then numerous scientific studies measure its efficacy: when it comes to pain, mindfulness can be as effective as the main prescription painkillers. Many hospital clinics abroad prescribe mindfulness meditation to help patients cope effectively with a range of diseases such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, back problems, fibromyalgia a.o.

A taste of this program is included in our Workshop. We will cultivate a closer relationship with our body and breath, we will accept pain whilst taking care of ourselves, we will appreciate the pleasant experiences and also acknowledge the difficulties in life, we will be reminded that we are interconnected with other people and, finally, we will acknowledge that although we can’t control what life throws on us, we can choose how to respond.