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The Power of Mindfulness in Medicine

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Mindfulness in medical practice is not new; it is a rediscovery of what medicine has always required: presence. At its heart, mindfulness is the discipline of intentional awareness—listening without distraction, noticing what often goes unseen, and responding with thoughtful clarity rather than hurried reaction. For medical providers, this means more than accurate diagnosis and treatment; it means attending to the humanity of the patient before us.

Florence Nightingale embodied the practice of mindfulness long before the word entered our medical vocabulary. In the shadowed wards of the Crimean War, she became known as the “Lady with the Lamp,” walking softly among the wounded long after others had gone to rest. She carried little more than a lamp and a notebook, yet what she offered was far greater than supplies or statistics—she offered presence. Her nightly rounds did more than dress wounds or record fevers; they conveyed to suffering soldiers that they were seen, heard, and valued as human beings. The glow of her lamp became more than light in the darkness—it became a sym-

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bol of attentiveness, quiet compassion, and healing through presence.

Today, though medicine is armed with powerful technologies, advanced diagnostics, and vast stores of data, the same principle endures. Healing begins not only with pro-

space for empathy, trust, and wiser clinical decisions. These mindful encounters are not luxuries; they are the essence of medicine.

This issue of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* highlights that truth through stories of presence. In *Will You Still Be Here Tomorrow?*,¹

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cedures or prescriptions but with the mindful act of showing up—listening without hurry, noticing without judgment, and being fully present with those in our care. Nightingale’s lamp reminds us that mindfulness is not an accessory to medicine; it is, at its very core, the steady light that guides both science and compassion toward healing.

Yet in modern practice, presence feels increasingly fragile. Clinicians juggle electronic records, productivity benchmarks, and fragmented systems of care. The quiet acts of listening, noticing, and staying with patients are too often overshadowed by competing demands. True mindfulness in medicine means cultivating attentiveness—setting aside distractions, biases, and the urge to rush—to create

Aneri Bhargav Patel recounts the story of a 6-year-old whose worsening breathing was nearly lost in the shuffle of electronic notes and pended orders until attentive presence at the bedside revealed the urgency of his condition. When his grandmother asked softly, “Will you still be here tomorrow?” she gave voice to a universal need: the longing for continuity, trust, and care that goes beyond protocols. Patel’s reflection—woven with the memory of Sanju, a child in a rural Indian village treated by her father—underscores that healing is sustained not only by interventions but by presence and the promise of being there. This is mindfulness in action: noticing what might otherwise be missed, pausing long enough to connect, and offering the reassurance of genuine presence.

Also in this issue, William Cayley, MD, reflects on his family's loss of their home to fire in *I Know How You Feel*.² In the aftermath, he found new meaning in those simple words—spoken by others who had endured similar devastation—and later, when patients shared their own stories of fire and trauma, he discovered that his experience allowed him to listen with deeper awareness and respond with greater authenticity. This, too, is mindfulness: the capacity to bring one's own lived experience into awareness, to engage without judgment, and to transform suffering into empathy. Cayley's story reminds us that mindfulness is not only about focus in the moment but also about cultivating self-awareness that allows clinicians to connect with patients in ways that are authentic, healing, and profoundly human.

Mindfulness matters in medicine because it is the foundation of trust—the true currency of the medical provider–patient relationship—and it is not earned through efficiency alone. Trust grows when a clinician is fully present, lingering at the bedside, listening without distraction,

and acknowledging suffering without rushing past it. In doing so, mindfulness also shapes the very nature of healing, which extends beyond curing disease to restoring dignity, reducing fear, and strengthening resilience. Patients may not remember their lab values years later, but they will remember the clinician who sat with them, who returned the next day, and who offered undivided attention.

Practicing mindfulness sharpens perception as well, allowing medical providers to notice what technology and numbers may overlook. Just as Nightingale's nightly rounds revealed not only wounds but also the unspoken fears of her patients, a mindful clinician today may discern the rasp of a breath, the tremor in a hand, or the fatigue etched on a caregiver's face—small details that often guide better care. Finally, mindfulness sustains medical providers themselves; in an era marked by relentless demands and burnout, it is not an added burden but a grounding force that reconnects us to the meaning of our vocation and reminds us why we chose medicine in the first place. By cultivating presence,

we rediscover purpose and joy, even during overwhelming pressures.

As medicine advances with new technologies, treatments, and systems of care, the temptation is to equate progress with speed and efficiency. Yet the stories in this issue remind us that healing is sustained not only by science but also by presence. Mindfulness calls us back to this truth—it asks us to slow down enough to notice, to listen, and to connect. For medical providers, it is a discipline that strengthens trust, sharpens judgment, and restores meaning. For patients, it is a lifeline of dignity and hope. Medicine heals most deeply when it is practiced with mindful presence—this is both our heritage and our path forward.

REFERENCES

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2. Cayley WE. I know how you feel. *WMJ*. 20225;124(4): 321-322.



“Being Held”

About the Artist

Leslie Schoen is a central Wisconsin photographer and artist with a background as a marriage and family therapist. Leslie's creative process is a dialogue between artist and viewer, where emotions are absorbed and translated into images. Through abstraction, diffusion, and layered techniques, she creates compassionate, story-driven imagery that explores truth, perception, and human connection, inviting viewers into a shared space of reflection, vulnerability, and strength.

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