

Effects of Transcendental Meditation on Academic Physician Burnout and Depression: A Mixed Methods Randomized Controlled Trial

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Metrics

Abstract

Introduction:

Burnout is pervasive among physicians and has widespread implications for individuals and institutions. This research study examines, for the first time, the effects of the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique on academic physician burnout and depression.

Methods:

A mixed methods randomized controlled trial was conducted with 40 academic physicians representing 15 specialties at a medical school and affiliated VA hospital using the TM technique as the active intervention. Physicians were measured at baseline, 1 month, and 4 months using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory, Insomnia Severity Index, Perceived Stress Scale, and Brief Resilience Scale. Repeated measures analysis of covariance was used to assess adjusted mean change scores for the 1- and 4-months posttests. Qualitative interviews were conducted at baseline and 4 months and compared with the quantitative measurements.

Results:

Significant improvements were found for the TM group compared with controls at 4 months in total burnout ($p = .020$) including the Maslach Burnout Inventory dimensions of emotional exhaustion ($p = .042$) and personal accomplishment ($p = .018$) and depression ($p = .016$). Qualitative interviews supported quantitative outcomes. Physicians reported classic burnout and depression symptoms in baseline interviews. Those regularly practicing the TM technique reported relief from those symptoms. The control group did not state similar changes.

Discussion:

Mixed methods findings suggest the TM technique is a viable and effective intervention to decrease burnout and depression for academic physicians. Larger longitudinal studies with a wider range of health care providers are needed to validate these findings for extrapolation to the greater medical community.

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