

Mindfulness

with Nicola Smith

9th November 2020

TRANSCRIPT

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Steven Bruce

We're gonna be talking about mindfulness today. And mindfulness is something which I think has really caught the popular imagination over certainly the last year or two and is gaining momentum in the NHS as well as elsewhere. But I thought the other day that it would be very useful for us to consider this because not only is this a fairly stressful time when it might be helpful as a practical discipline, but also, it's worth us being able to talk to our patients about it. It's worth us knowing about what evidence there is behind mindfulness. So, Nicola, it's great to have you in studio. Nicola Smith, you are a counsellor and you're a mindfulness expert. How do you feel about what I've just said? Is there a lot of evidence behind mindfulness?

Nicola Smith

There really is yes, a huge amount of evidence, if you google mindfulness studies, then you will be overwhelmed by the number of studies. And I think the earliest studies were basically around people with chronic pain and those people who had relapsing depression and they're the ones where there's the strongest evidence for mindfulness.

Steven Bruce

Is there an ongoing study in the NHS or elsewhere, looking at what is happening with mindfulness now?

Nicola Smith

Yes, yes, there are. There are lots of different studies around, I can send you some information if people want to look into specific ones.

Steven Bruce

It'd be nice to have some research if there's been some credible research out there. Because I suspect that a lot of people are still wondering whether it's a bit of a fashion rather than evidence-based medicine, which is, of course, what we're taught we must adhere to these days. What are you going to do with us today? You're going to give some practical demonstrations of mindfulness?

Nicola Smith

I am, yes. I'm looking forward to that. I can talk about mindfulness and I will do a little bit of that and answer questions as well. But I do think the way to understand mindfulness is actually to try it out. So, I thought we could do at least two practices today if we have time.

Steven Bruce

Well, before you start talking to us about mindfulness, I just want to say to you, I have done my homework and I've been out and I have bought some Lindt chocolate and some Green and Blacks, just to see if either has a more beneficial effect than the other, I promise to try and finish them by the end of the show. Why do we need these?

Nicola Smith

We need the chocolate because we're going to do a meditation on chocolate. So, using chocolate as part of the meditation just to show you the different ways that we can meditate. I think sometimes people think and assume that meditation is all about sitting cross legged in some exotic, quiet place. But actually, mindfulness is something we need to be able to do every day. It's much more helpful, I think, if we can bring it into our everyday lives.

Steven Bruce

So, tell us what mindfulness actually is.

Nicola Smith

Okay, so there are lots of different definitions, as you can imagine. But one of the ones I like is that living in mindfulness is a way of staying regularly and calmly in the present moment. So, one of the things we're trying to do really is to bring ourselves into the present moment on a more regular basis than we normally would. Most of the time, many of us spend a lot of time lost in our thoughts. somewhere else, we're not actually sort of in the activity and the room that we're in, we're very much kind of thinking about what we've got to do next. And I know that was certainly my experience before I did mindfulness, I was doing something but I was always thinking about a little list of things that I needed to do later and mindfulness has helped me.

Steven Bruce

Just in terms of how we use it in medicine, I suppose that's the only reason to use it, it's a psychological protocol. Is this something that someone who has not done some formal course in mindfulness would be able to advise patients on or do they need someone like yourself who is trained in psychotherapy and counselling?

Nicola Smith

Yes, to both, in a way. Obviously, it's ideal if you've done it yourself, I think that's certainly the way to kind of best deliver mindfulness and mindfulness advice. However, there are lots of really good apps and programs out there that are available that you can direct your patients to. So again, I can give you some information, because I think if you go online, you would just be overwhelmed, and some of them are better than others. So yeah, I will definitely do that.

Steven Bruce

So, in terms of what practitioners, primarily osteopaths, chiropractors, physiotherapists, will get from today's session, they will be able to direct patients to a useful resource, and they'll be able to explain how it is that mindfulness can be useful to them?

Nicola Smith

Yes, but I think also, hopefully, the other huge benefit, I'm hoping, is that they will get a taste of what mindfulness is like for themselves, because I think as a sort of self-care philosophy if you like, it's really, really helpful for those of us that work in health and when we're dealing with lots of other people's problems.

Steven Bruce

I interrupted you, sorry.

Nicola Smith

So, I mean, I think it's really important that we do care for ourselves first and then we are in a much better position to care and listen to our patients, we're going to be there for them much more easily if we're in the moment, listening to them, rather than actually thinking about what we're going to have supper later or do I need to pop into Sainsbury's on the way home or whatever it is that's popping into our mind. What mindfulness doesn't do is stop those kinds of thoughts coming in, but it does help you to be a lot more aware of when they do pop in and then being able to bring yourself back to focusing on what you really need to focus on or what you really want to focus on in the moment.

Steven Bruce

So, are you going to give us a demonstration or talk us through the experience?

Nicola Smith

I think that would be really nice to do that now, actually, as a kind of settling in thing for everyone. So, I'm going to do something called the five things exercise, which is really quite a nice way of using our senses really to help us be mindful. So, can I invite us all to first of all, consider the way we're sitting or posture, that usually makes people kind of sit upright, we do want to encourage that a bit but I think the important thing is that we're comfortable, and then invite people to place their feet flat on the floor. So that you can feel your feet on the floor, hands on the lap, and then maybe just pushing yourself just to the back of the chair a little bit more. So that, it does depend on the chair you're in, but just so that your back is a little bit more upright. So just hands resting comfortably on the lap. And then just maybe just closing the eyes for a moment just to be aware or dropping your gaze if that's more comfortable. And just start by just being aware of the contact points of the body at the moment. So, you might want to just be aware of your feet on the floor, just noticing the feel of your feet on the floor, just being aware of the main contact points, around the ball of the foot, the heel, of your sense of your feet inside your socks or shoes or slippers, whatever you're wearing at the moment, you may even want to give your toes a little wriggle just to check that they're there. And just having a sense of that sensory awareness, that sensory connection with the body. And then moving the attention from the feet up to the seat. So really, we're talking here, I guess about the buttocks, the backs of the legs, the lower back, just being aware of those contact points. And just tuning into those, just noticing any sensations that are there, perhaps there's a sense of coolness, warmth from the hands-on top of your lap, maybe there's a sense of contact with the buttock or the lower back, feeling supported by the seat. Just noticing those for a moment. Letting yourself settle into the posture that feels right for you at the moment. So, the main thing is doing what's right for you right now in this moment. And then if we take

the attention from the contact points of the body now to the eyes. So, as we go into the next moment, if I can invite you to open your eyes and you may want to look at the screen perhaps first of all, I'm assuming that most of you are gazing into a screen. So, you might want to notice the screen. Just notice the frame around the screen. Notice what you can see on the screen at the moment. Actually, seeing the people that are there, the backgrounds, colours. And then just giving yourself a moment or two just to notice any five things either on the screen or around the screen. Just five things that come into your awareness of sight, your vision, at the moment. Don't need to go searching for them, I think you'll find, quite easy to notice five things you can see. And then I'm assuming that won't take too long. If I can just ask you to gently close your eyes or drop your gaze again, just to help you focus. Because the next thing I'm going to invite you to do is to focus your attention on your sense of hearing. So maybe just be aware of any five things that you can hear at the moment. And again, you don't need to go searching for them. You don't need to list them. Really just noticing, just observing any five things in this moment. Just allow five things to come into the awareness of your ears. Some are maybe distant sounds, some of them may be very nearby. Some may be loud, some may be quiet. And then for the third part of this exercise, just moving your attention now from sound and hearing, to feeling. So just noticing any five things that you can feel at the moment. So, it could be things that you feel internally or it might be things you feel externally as you sit here. Just being aware and tuning into any five things that you can feel, it doesn't matter if you don't get five. Again, you don't have to list them, remember them. It's just observing them in the here and now. Just let them come into your awareness. And then gently, bringing the attention away from the sense of feeling and bringing the attention back to the body as a whole, just sitting here. Just having, an awareness of yourself sitting here on your chair, noticing how that feels, noticing things about your body, like your posture, has something changed? Does it feel more comfortable now? Are there things you want to change? Just really tuning in to whatever is here in this moment. I'm just going to ring some bells just to denote the end of the exercise. So, as we come to the end, just gently open your eyes again. Okay, so I forgot to ring the bells at the beginning, but we normally ring the bells at the beginning and the end because it helps people to know when we're doing the actual practice.

Steven Bruce

Do you do this normally online now or you do have to do this in person with your client?

Nicola Smith

Online at the moment. So, I've got some ongoing sort of drop-in sessions that I'm doing in my other workplace. But I'm also offering mindfulness courses online as well.

Steven Bruce

Will you be doing that with multiple people attending or is it just one person, one on one?

Nicola Smith

No, I'll be doing it with multiple people attending. So, one of the best researched and best ways to learn mindfulness is learning in a group. And we've been discovering that we can do that perfectly well online as

well. So yeah, so a group of people going through the experience together learning together. It's really helpful.

Steven Bruce

Right there. So, we did, how many minutes, five minutes, six minutes, something like that, just working through our senses, sitting down, feeling everything that's going on, listening and so on. What has that achieved?

Nicola Smith

Okay. So, one of the things that people may have noticed is that using the senses gives you a way of bringing yourself to the moment, of kind of anchoring yourself in the moment, which is what we're aiming to do with mindfulness. But hopefully, what they also may have noticed is they may have noticed that their mind has been wandering and we'll talk a bit more about that in a moment. But our minds are perpetual wanderers. Sometimes people talk about it, it's a bit like the puppy mind, we have to keep noticing where it's gone and pulling it back. And we don't give ourselves a hard time about that. We just accept that's what our minds do. But we can train ourselves through something like mindfulness to bring ourselves back. So, we have something like the senses or the body or breath or chocolate today to help anchor our attention in the moment it can make it a lot easier, especially in the early stages where we're less practised at it really.

Steven Bruce

And what was the evidence about how this is affecting things like chronic pain? I mean, you said that people with chronic pain are benefiting, what is the proposed mechanism of action?

Nicola Smith

Okay. There's lots of theories about that but I think one of the main things is really that what people find is when they have chronic pain, it actually draws all their attention to that particular part of the body. And what mindfulness does, I think, allows the perspectives to be a little bit wider. So, I think when we were focused on pain, especially if it's quite strong, it grabs our attention. That's what it's meant to do. But obviously, it's not helpful if it's chronic pain. It's something we have to learn to live with. So, mindfulness helps people to perhaps have a slightly more accepting stance towards the pain, but also to have the choice about whether they focus on that pain or whether they perhaps focus on other parts of the body where there isn't so much pain. So, it's kind of acts as a way of anchoring the attention to other things.

Steven Bruce

Do you deal with lots of chronic pain patients yourself?

Nicola Smith

I have had some. But it isn't the main thing I've dealt with, I guess one of the main ones that I'm dealing with really are people with other issues around their wellbeing. So perhaps more psychological issues like anxiety, people who've had depression, worry, other sort of psychological problems, but also, I think people

do see mindfulness as something that actually improves their wellbeing in general. People who find that life is very stressful, mindfulness is a way of helping you to be more resilient.

Steven Bruce

Yes, I guess I'm thinking in terms of, I'm sure you're familiar with the term central sensitization, where the feedback to the brain is such that it can't shut out what would normally be insignificant pain signals, etc, is magnified. I just wonder whether mindfulness is effectively, in some ways is working to address that. But I also wonder whether mindfulness appeals to a certain type of person and I have a certain type of person in mind at the moment who suffers chronic pain, I'm pretty confident that if I told this particular patient to sit down and think about his buttocks and the backs of his legs and the five things he could hear, I'd get some negative feedback, I get some kick back, even. I just don't think that he would particularly feel this was a remedy for pain. He's going to insist that it's drugs or surgery or treatment that he needs, not psychology. What do you think about that?

Nicola Smith

Yeah, I think that is one of the issues that people really struggle with. And I think understandably, really. We are very primed to see that we need to fix our problems. And certainly, that's the case with pain. And so, we go back and forth, get lots of medical interventions to try and help with that. But I guess mindfulness, is perhaps most helpful when those that those have been explored and there aren't other avenues to go down. And then mindfulness can help people to perhaps, live with their pain differently. And some of the people that do a lot of mindfulness teaching are people that have experienced chronic pain themselves and are living daily with chronic pain. So, they speak from experience. And you know, just how radical and helpful it is. But it is, as you say, quite hard to convey that in the first place to people.

Steven Bruce

When this has been used in the NHS, how do they encourage the buy in that's needed for chronic pain patients?

Nicola Smith

Well, I guess it's a case of giving people a chance to perhaps have a taster session, a bit like we are today and talk to their therapist, whoever they're working with, about what could be achieved. And I think it's also kind of getting across the idea that it's not the only answer. It's not the only thing, it's not going to be a complete cure. It's not about that, but it's about sort of living with the pain differently really. And that could apply for psychological problems as well. We're learning to live with anxiety, stress, depression differently when that comes and goes.

Steven Bruce

You said that a lot of your patients are not pain patients, they come to you for other reasons, for anxiety or whatever. Is there is a category of patients that has been identified as the most susceptible to benefit from mindfulness?

Nicola Smith

No, I don't think so. I think it's just that most of the research started with those with relapsing depression. Mindfulness isn't that helpful when somebody is in the middle of an episode of depression, but it's helpful to help prevent future relapses. And that's where the strongest evidence is. But obviously, similar things can apply to anxiety, worrying and stress problems and stress and so on.

Steven Bruce

So just slightly off the main topic of mindfulness, but maybe a lot of practitioners will be thinking, well, if someone hasn't already had a diagnosis of depression or stress, anxiety, or whatever. What should we be looking for? Are there significant clues that we should be looking for to say, actually, you might benefit from going to see Nicola and learning about mindfulness?

Nicola Smith

Yeah, that's a really good question. I personally, and I would say this, but I think most people can benefit from mindfulness, but I think obviously not everybody is open to the idea. So, we have to sort of try and discern that a little bit as well. And obviously before they start a course of mindfulness, I would meet with people individually and talk together about whether this is the right thing at the right time for them. But I think if you can have a sense that somebody is intensifying their problems, perhaps by the stress that they're putting on themselves, seemingly very worried about the future, or perhaps they're caught up in past stuff, then mindfulness could be a really helpful thing, I think.

Steven Bruce

Susan has just sent in a question, asking about whether you are ever concerned about using mindfulness in PTSD cases?

Nicola Smith

Yes. One of the therapies I do actually works directly with people who suffer from PTSD. So, I'm very well aware of the problems with trauma, PTSD, and so on. And the way I find it helpful is if people have some treatment, perhaps something more proactive, directly with the trauma first and then mindfulness is really helpful after that, to do a course of mindfulness, that's worked out really well with quite a few people I'm aware of. So yeah, definitely helpful.

Steven Bruce

I might be missing something in that question, because that obviously sparked some interest in your mind there, why would you be worried about using PTSD simply because it might not be the best therapy or because it might provoke something?

Nicola Smith

Because it could, if somebody is in full flow of the symptoms of PTSD, it might be a bit triggering for them, it might be too soon, in a way. They may be able to benefit from some aspects of mindfulness but perhaps

doing the whole course, may not be the right thing. And I think it would have to be explored with the individual first to identify what they would need.

Steven Bruce

I've just realised that I did you a bit of a disservice at the start here, because I glossed over what do you do for a living. You are a counsellor, you're a psychotherapist. You mentioned something else there.

Nicola Smith

So, I'm CBT therapist, so cognitive behaviour therapy. But I'm also trained in something called EMDR, eye movement, desensitisation and reprocessing, which is a heck of a mouthful, hence it gets reduced to EMDR. Which is a trauma focused therapy. So that's another really important part of my work. And I find mindfulness is helpful in conjunction with that, there's quite a lot about what we do in CBT and EMDR that kind of really matches very well with mindfulness. But I would stress again that you don't have to have these problems to get the benefit from mindfulness. I think many of us health practitioners, especially teachers is another category of people that I feel experienced a lot of stress and really benefit from mindfulness.

Steven Bruce

There's probably a whole 90-minute broadcast that we could do on EMDR. But can you give us the 30 second elevator pitch on what EMDR is, how it works, what you do?

Nicola Smith

Okay, so EMDR helps people to deal with the troubling memories that are unhelpful when you've experienced a trauma. And for some of those people, that trauma may have been many, many years ago. But what EMDR does is it helps people to let that trauma rest in the past, instead of it being something that's actively distressing, triggering on a day-to-day basis. And it does that via eye movements or other bilateral stimulation. So, there can be lots of different ways, tappers, headphones, all sorts of different ways of achieving it. Is that okay, for a quick elevator pitch?

Steven Bruce

Yeah I think so. People will probably have heard of EMDR and I've heard of it, because we've got two people in my clinic who do that, including yourself. But I confess I don't actually know how it works or what it does, but we will come back to it.

Nicola Smith

Yeah, we'll do another broadcast about that.

Steven Bruce

I've got a great question from Carolyn Norgate here. I like it because the last sentence, she says can you suggest different ways of introducing patients to mindfulness in terms of using alternative vocabulary and

framing it differently? Because many people have preconceived ideas and immediately think is too whoo for them.

Nicola Smith

No, I agree. Yeah, difficult to come up with a word that expresses it, because as you say, it does have a lot of connotations with it nowadays, especially that it's a bit sort of new agey, perhaps. But I think, perhaps, everyday awareness. Yeah, I think I would avoid meditation because again, I think that's another one that is perhaps even more so than mindfulness. The kind of mindfulness I teach is something called Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. So, it is a therapeutic technique as well, with elements of CBT within that.

Steven Bruce

Okay, so perhaps for those people who like to look at research on these things, and many of the osteos, chiro, physios watching will like that, I'm sure there is terminology in there, which explains this is the mechanism of action, it is by directing your thoughts in a particular way. So instead of saying mindfulness, which does sound like a fashionable term these days, or meditation, which it's not, perhaps we can just say we can use your mind, the power of your mind.

Nicola Smith

Another way that I find helpful as well as for people is just telling them it's a training program for the mind, a bit like a fitness program for the mind. Because we go to the gym to get physically fit and mindfulness is a way of helping us to get mentally fit. And we need to practice regularly to keep that fitness. We don't go to the gym and sort of just stop when we're fit. We continue to keep fit. So, mindfulness is a mental fitness program. That's perhaps a more helpful way of understanding it.

Steven Bruce

This is all very helpful, of course, because, you are aware of this, I am sure, but certainly chiropractors and osteopaths are required to communicate with patients in ways which the patient is going to understand. And putting it into terms like that, helpful in clarifying the minds of the patients. Of course, everybody watching is thinking, he's saying that so he can justify ticking that one off the practice standards, which is true, because that's actually what we're doing. Right, I'm getting quite hungry for some chocolate.

Nicola Smith

Yeah, no, absolutely. Well, what we're going to do is, I'm going to invite you all to have a go at meditating with chocolate. All it means is you need to first of all-

Steven Bruce

You said meditating.

Nicola Smith

I did. Yes. Yeah, I did. Sorry about that. Okay, getting mentally fit with chocolate. How about that? Okay, so can I ask you, first of all, to get two pieces of chocolate, quite small, or two raisins or two pieces of cheese or whatever it is you've chosen. I have a bar of chocolate here.

Steven Bruce

My definition of small might be different from everybody else's.

Nicola Smith

Yeah. Possibly, possibly. Think of it as what you can get in the mouth at one time. Okay, there's a challenge here from Steven, I think. So, I'm going to ring the little bell, and I'm going to invite us to take part in this exercise. So, let's call it that. Okay, so I'm assuming everybody's had time to get their props ready. And can I just invite you, first of all, to settle into a comfortable position again, as we did before, so just making sure you're comfortable, making sure that your feet are perhaps flat on the floor, that your seat is comfortable, sitting a little bit more upright than maybe you normally would, and then this time, have one hand perhaps on top of the other, and onto the top hand, just place your two objects, your two pieces of food. And what I'm going to ask you to do is just to try and imagine, if you can, that you're coming at this with a beginner's mind. So, what we're aiming to try and do is imagine that you've not seen these objects before. We're just trying to anticipate that we might have certain reactions to these items normally. So, we're going to be just taking our time just to notice them resting on our hand, first of all, so just give yourself a moment or two, a little bit like we did with the first exercise just using the our sense of vision really, first of all, just to notice, perhaps the difference in shape and size between the two things we have in our hand, being aware of colour, maybe being aware of the way the light interacts on the surfaces. And then maybe just gently kind of moving them around and perhaps picking one of them up, giving it a bit of a squeeze, putting it back down again, just turning them around on your hand. And you may start to notice the feel on your hand, you might start to notice the sticky traces that are perhaps left behind as you move the objects around. So just giving a chance to get the feel of them first of all. The sense of perhaps, this beginner's mind, allowing you not to prejudge what the experience is going to be like, then I'm going to invite you just to choose one of the objects. So, leaving one behind in your hand and the other one, just picking it up. And perhaps having a sense of why you chose that one. Perhaps there was something that made you choose that in particular, and then maybe just moving to smell, so bringing the object up to your nose. Just noticing what, if anything, you can smell at the moment, what comes into your sensory awareness of smell. What's there for you at the moment? And does that sort of bring up any kind of anticipation of actually getting to consume this in due course. Just noticing any reactions. Are there other thoughts that come up? We talked about how the mind wanders, we might find that as we smell, various memories or thoughts come up, which take our minds away. And then we're going to use our sense of hearing, which is perhaps a little bit unusual with something we eat, but just tapping on the item and just seeing if there's any resonance there. Might be some, maybe nothing at all. And then just, once you've done that, just in your own time, just placing it back on your hand again. And now getting ready to choose the one that you're going to consume first. So again, making a choice. Noticing what brought you to that particular choice, picking the item up in your hand. And then just gently taking up to just sense it on your lips, first of all, so you might want to just pat it on the lips to see if

there's any sense of anticipation that comes with that. Maybe noticing the smell as well as the touch on the lips as you do that. And then when you feel ready, I'm not going to join in with this because I won't be able to speak, but just place the item on your tongue but without moving your mouth at all. So just leaving it there to rest on your tongue for a moment. Just think how that feels. Just noticing perhaps whether there are urges that come up for you, that want you to move the objects around. You may find you focus more easily on this exercise if you just close your eyes or drop your gaze, and just really sense the experience. So just holding it there for a few more seconds. If that's possible, just letting the texture change a bit, you may notice changes as you keep the item there and then gently starting to move the object around the tongue. So perhaps just noticing that are different tastebuds there, which may bring up different flavours as you move the object around. Maybe just pushing it more towards your teeth perhaps now. Without really chewing but just letting it move around your mouth just seeing how that feels. And noticing what sort of things are coming up. Maybe as you anticipate the idea of chewing, just starting to think are you noticing that there's a particular part of the mouth that you'd naturally move things to do the chewing. Just see how it feels perhaps to notice that and maybe do the opposite perhaps move the object somewhere else in your mouth to do that chewing. So, taking on the action of chewing now. Just see what's left to chew, maybe there isn't that much to chew now maybe the saliva has already done its work in breaking things down. Seeing what flavours are there as you chew, what senses, what textures and then maybe starting to anticipate swallowing the object. So, when you feel ready, just allowing the object to slide down if it hasn't already. And just seeing how that experience is, just noticing the feeling as the object goes down the throat. Being aware of any traces left in your mouth as you sit here. And then once that one has gone and if I can invite you to just consume the next one in whatever way you like. So perhaps doing it in exactly the way that you normally would. And just see how that feels. See what you notice, such as placing it in your mouth, doing whatever you normally would do when you eat something like this and just noticing the difference. And yeah, this is the stage where Steven is demonstrating that we may need to grab a tissue or hanky to wipe the hand. Often some sticky traces left behind so I'll just give you a moment or two to finish eating I'll ring the bell, because we will be able to talk again once Steven has finished consuming.

Steven Bruce

Well, I thoroughly enjoyed my Green and Blacks. I might do the same thing several times more later in the day. Obviously, my choice of chocolate was dependent entirely on which was the largest piece. I'm very conscious now that you said, you've got to smell this, because I poked myself in the nose with a piece of chocolate. So, I've probably got a blob of chocolate on my nose. And then you said tap it and I thought you meant tap it on your ear. So, I've probably got chocolate on my ear and it's probably all over my teeth. But it was a thoroughly enjoyable experience. So, I thoroughly recommend mindfulness with Green and Blacks chocolate. I'm also conscious that this is very Pavlovian, isn't it? You ring the bells and we think of chocolate, so everybody starts to salivate. Exactly like Pavlov's dog. We've had some questions. Vlad has said, if it's appropriate, as osteopaths, or chiropractors I guess, is there some sort of accelerated course to being able to help our patients from a CBT, mindfulness, counselling perspective? Is there something that people with our level of medical training practice review, which is a shortened version of the in-depth training that you've had?

Nicola Smith

I have done shorter courses and quite a lot of practitioners do, particularly with say teachers who maybe me feel they need a shorter course as well. So, we've done the course in six weeks rather than the eight.

Steven Bruce

Which course, mindfulness?

Nicola Smith

Yes, the mindfulness. But I'm not aware of any specifically for practitioners that are any shorter than that really. I would say on the whole, if you get much shorter than that, then you miss out quite a lot.

Steven Bruce

But that's six weeks of solid training every day of the week is it?

Nicola Smith

No, basically, what it would involve the mindfulness course, if you did the eight-week course, it would be approximately just under two-hour session per week. And then obviously, the invitation to do the practising on a daily basis as well, obviously, that's what develops the skills. Because essentially what we're doing, it's a training program so we're developing skills. And the more you can do that, as an individual, I think it's easier then to develop those, as you know, delivering that to other people or recommending it to others.

Steven Bruce

What about CBT? Vlad also mentioned counselling in there as well and counselling particularly is a pretty in-depth skill with all sorts of constraints around practitioners and monitoring of practitioners as well. Is there any, I don't want to shortcut, but is there any way of developing a level of ability there that you can help patients with?

Nicola Smith

Yes, I guess there are things you can do, you can look up online, but I think it wouldn't train you to be a counsellor or a CBT practitioner. But I think you can perhaps get some of the principles, which may be enough to support the work that you're doing. But I think if somebody does need counselling or CBT or whatever, then obviously, they need to be referred to someone that can do that. But I think there are some principles that, yeah.

Steven Bruce

How long is a standard CBT course?

Nicola Smith

Well, the one I did was a year. But again, it was a once-a-week attendance thing. Well, it was over a year, actually, because it was a post grad course, there are different ones available. The CDC best place to look it

up is the BABCP, which is the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapists, again we may be able to provide a link to that. That tells you a lot about CBT training so that may be a good place to start.

Steven Bruce

And what were the entrance requirements for that course. Do you remember?

Nicola Smith

Well, because there are lots of different courses, it's difficult to say. But when I did it, I was already a mental health practitioner. So, I think, as I say, there will be different ways that people would work, which would obviously that the entry requirements would be very different according to what course people are wanting to do, really, and how they want to use it. It's a bit like the other way around, I guess you wouldn't really want to be recommending an osteopathy course, too much of a crash course, for someone like me to use so I think it's trying to sort of balance it out, isn't it, so we can have some skills.

Steven Bruce

It was fairly optimistic inquiry, I think, because, for example, the osteopathy course is an awful lot shorter with someone who's done a medical degree.

Nicola Smith

Yes, exactly, it's the same.

Steven Bruce

And vice versa, in fact. But there's not so much crossover between psychotherapy, mental health issues, and osteopathy.

Nicola Smith

This course will be a quicker way of getting some of those CBT principles, I think and techniques that you could use with your practitioners as well, definitely.

Steven Bruce

A couple of people have apparently asked if the OsteoMAP training is still running, which was a course being run at the UCO, University College of Osteopathy, mindfulness and acceptance-based training. Apparently that study has now finished so I don't know any more about that. If anyone's got any more information, please share it with us. But Lucy has sent in an observation, Nicola, she says that she's had both CBT and EMDR and mindfulness crosses over with both of those. But she's also used the body focusing techniques to help reinforce proprioception. Is that something you're familiar with?

Nicola Smith

Okay, no, I'm not actually so no. I think obviously mindfulness does focus on the body quite a bit. So, I mean, I could see how that would be helpful, definitely.

Steven Bruce

Interestingly, years and years ago, I did some sort of, wasn't directed by anybody else, I decided I'd have look at auto hypnosis. Wanted to focus my mind on doing some things that I wanted to do better. And a lot of that seems to crossover with meditation and mindfulness, in terms of start at your toes and see if you could feel them and all of this. In hypnosis I think it's quite common to say right, when now tighten all those muscles, now tighten all the other ones and feel that sensation. But all of those disciplines do seem to overlap quite a bit and they all seem to add emphasis the idea, the fact, that we can train the mind to help us deal with a lot of other problems if we do.

Nicola Smith

Yes, absolutely. And I think one of the things that is really important when we do mindfulness and we learn mindfulness skills, is we start to kind of bring the mind and the body together much more. A lot of us get, as I said, we get very lost on what we call autopilot sort of lost in our thoughts, doing things in a very autopilot way. I'm sure we all can think of lots of experiences that we go through in life where driving, for instance, a lot of people have that experience, I've certainly had it, where you've driven somewhere and you realise you cannot remember anything about the journey. And sometimes you end up at the wrong place, because you've done an autopilot journey that you regularly you do and forget to take the turn you needed to take. So, we do spend a lot of time on autopilot. So, I think what mindfulness does, it helps to bring the mind and body together a bit more, we notice how much of our body is affected by what's going on in the mind. And I think that, that mind, body reactivity is a really important clue to helping our wellbeing and helping us to look after ourselves better.

Steven Bruce

Just quickly before we finish, Nicola, if a patient goes to see their GP with, it could be any sort of problem, but typically for osteopaths and chiropractors, our patients will be suffering some sort of pain. But if a patient goes to their GP with pain, whether it's chronic or acute or whatever, what is the standard response? I mean, are GPs now schooled to think mindfulness, find a mindfulness practitioner, or do they have to go to some specialist service?

Nicola Smith

I think generally, they would probably go to a specialist service. But they might suggest, it depends on the GP, I think, but they may suggest that mindfulness is helpful for people with pain. And certainly, a lot of people get referred to specialist pain centres and they offer mindfulness very much as a central part of what they do.

Steven Bruce

Does mindfulness feature in the NICE guidelines anywhere?

Nicola Smith

Yes, it does. Yes. Both for pain and also for depression. And increasingly there's lots more research where it's going to be introduced for all sorts of other areas as well. There's a lot of research going on in schools. The houses of parliament have regular mindfulness courses. And so, it's the lot in terms of making mindfulness accessible to lots of different groups of people, not just those with medical problems.

Steven Bruce

Have you got some more you wanted to do?

Nicola Smith

I've got a little quote I thought I would just read which might be helpful as well, in terms of selling mindfulness to the patients as well. And perhaps, you know, as a response to the pandemic too. "Mindfulness is not the answer to all life's problems. However, life's problems can be seen more clearly through the lens of a clear mind."

Steven Bruce

Very nice, I like that. Very quickly, Carolyn has said, would some life coaching courses also incorporate mindfulness?

Nicola Smith

They would actually, yes, I've been to something at the British Psychological Society a couple of times where it's been a life coach that's actually doing some training with incorporating life coaching and mindfulness. There's quite a lot of stuff on that.

Steven Bruce

Nicola, that's been brilliant. Thank you very much. The time flashed past, I haven't had time to finish both my bars of chocolate. I haven't even got close to it. I'll put some work in later.

Nicola Smith

Absolutely. Yeah, and I'll catch up later too, I've got mine here.