

Integration of a Mobile Mindfulness App on Employee Health Processes in a Virtual Environment

Kimberly Richards, DNP, MBA, RN, CNE and Ruth Ellen Yeager, DNP, RN, WHNP-BC

Structured Abstract

LOCAL PROBLEM

Important determinants of health are a population's health-promoting behaviors and its relationship with work: 40% of a population's health outcomes are shaped by social and economic factors (including work), 30% by individual health behaviors, 20% by clinical care, and 10% by the environment. Since the U.S. workforce spends at least 25% of their life on the job, including up to half of their waking hours, the workplace becomes an ideal setting for public health focus. Demographic shifts in the workforce also make the issue of healthier workers more urgent. Healthcare workers in the U.S. are an aging population increasingly affected by chronic illnesses related to smoking, physical inactivity, unhealthy diets, and chronic stress. Workplace stressors associated with work-life balance, people issues, and workload, contribute to a higher incidence of physical and mental disorders.

In a virtual work environment, faculty job activities take place in front of a computer. Student records, course content, and other resources are accessed from computer files and programs. Faculty meetings, course instruction, and peer interactions are conducted via the computer screen and phone. As a result, the virtual work environment presents a significant risk to nurse faculty of developing a more sedentary lifestyle. At Western Governors University (WGU), nursing faculty who work in home offices are observed to engage with organizational health-promotion resources and sponsored wellness activities in a sporadic fashion or to meet deadlines for insurance incentives, suggesting there is room for improvement in faculty engagement in health promotion and stress management.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to support faculty in developing and integrating a mindfulness meditation practice into their daily health practices.

METHODOLOGY

The Theory of Planned Behavior served as the theoretical guide for this project. According to this theory, the critical deciding factor in predicting a person's behavior is intention. Intention is an individual's internal willingness to engage in specific behaviors. Motives for action derive from an individual's conclusions of the results of engaging in a potential behavior, societal norms to which the individual has been exposed, and the individual's perceived locus of control. Through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior, this project was designed to promote the development of mindfulness among nursing faculty and improve faculty interactions with health-promoting resources currently available within the organization.

WGU nursing faculty were invited to participate in an Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation course via college newsletters, website banners, and social media channels

of Psi Upsilon Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International. The course included an orientation session for training on mindfulness to develop a foundation of positive attitudes and intentions necessary to promote change, as well as a brief orientation to the evidence-based mobile app Headspace, used as a tool to develop a daily mindfulness meditation practice. Four additional live support group sessions were provided to offer ongoing assistance for using the app plus additional mindfulness training to support behavioral change. Participants were asked to complete a survey at the conclusion of the project.

As the theoretical framework indicates, the critical factor to be changed to influence participant behaviors is the internal willingness to engage in mindfulness meditation. During the weekly support group meetings, participant attitudes were addressed with brief multimedia presentations conducted to explain the science behind mindfulness meditation and the benefits of daily practice. Subjective norms and participant perceptions about locus of control were addressed during the group discussion each week regarding experiences with mindfulness meditation using the mobile app; a sense of community and shared experiences was intentionally created.

RESULTS

Sixty faculty signed up for the offering; average attendance for each weekly session was 40. More than half of the survey respondents (55%) indicated daily use of the mobile mindfulness app, 89.29% said the mobile mindfulness app changed the way they perceived health promoting behaviors, and 86.21% of the respondents said they would recommend the mobile app to others. Almost all of the survey respondents (93%) said they would likely participate in a more advanced mindfulness meditation course. This new approach to supporting employee health in a virtual environment can easily be replicated and has the advantage of creating communities of nursing faculty that convene for health-related rather than primarily work-related reasons.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This problem is significant to the nursing profession because of potential long-term effects to qualified nursing faculty. As more nursing programs move to a virtual environment, it is important to learn how to best support faculty in creating healthy behaviors, maintaining healthy lifestyles, and supporting interpersonal communication and feelings of community in order to encourage optimal performance, satisfaction, and longevity in the nurse faculty role. By promoting engagement in wellness activities and behaviors, the potential exists to optimize employee health and organizational performance over the long term. Use of a mobile phone app for increasing mindfulness is an effective, low-cost, and highly accessible alternative to more expensive in-person employee assistance programs in improving personal health behaviors.

Keywords: mindfulness, meditation, stress, mobile app, faculty health

Team Leader: Dr. Gretchen McDaniel

Team Member(s): Dr. Jennifer Wasilewski