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The use of mindful breathing as part of the healthcare intake process

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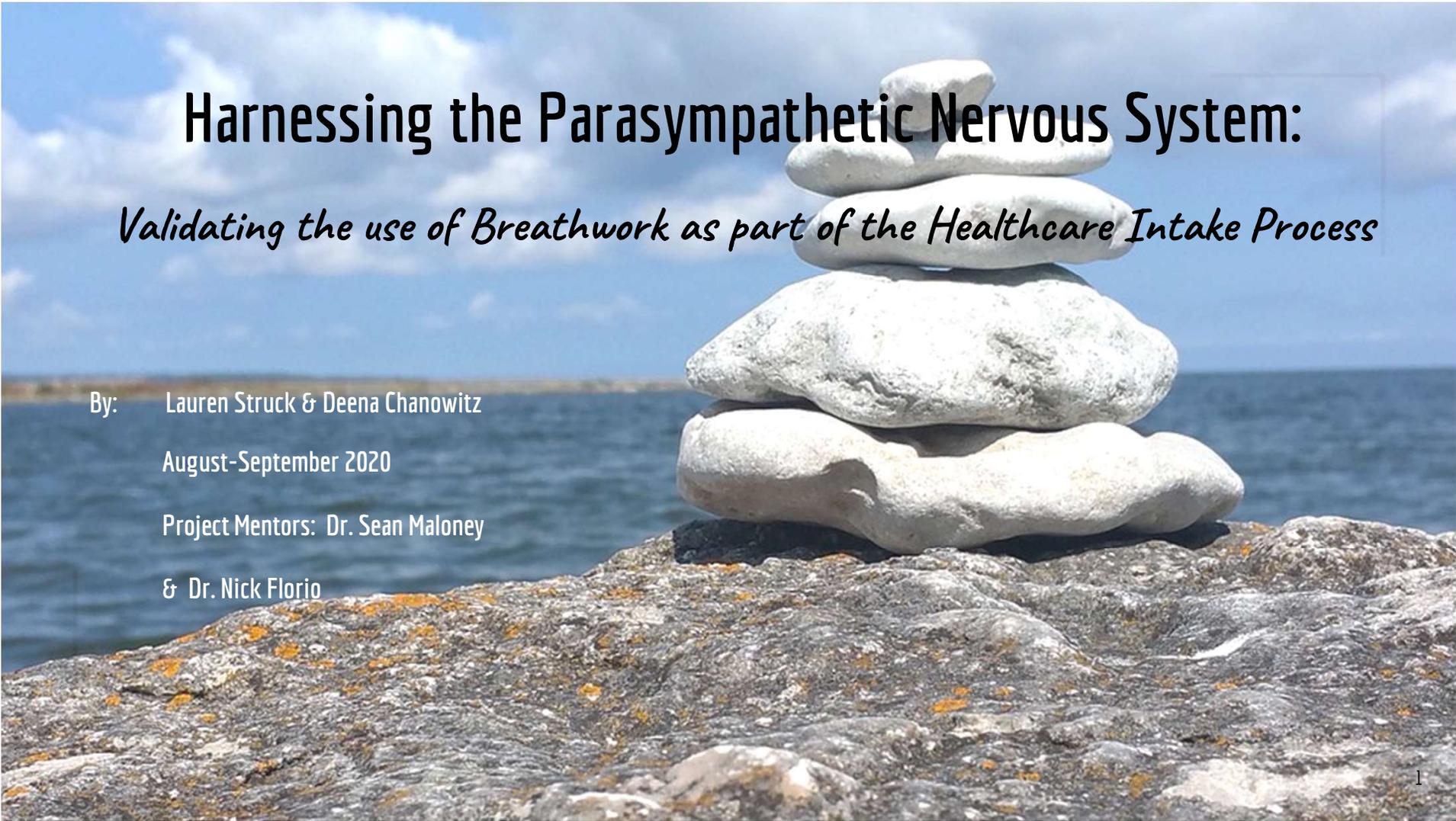


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Harnessing the Parasympathetic Nervous System:

Validating the use of Breathwork as part of the Healthcare Intake Process

By: Lauren Struck & Deena Chanowitz

August-September 2020

Project Mentors: Dr. Sean Maloney

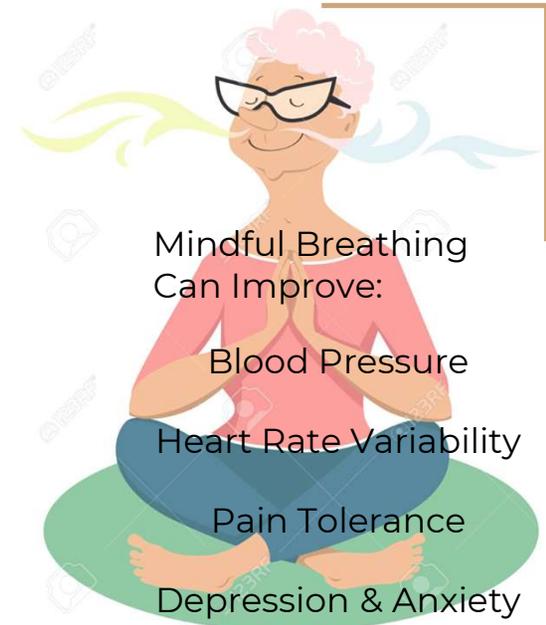
& Dr. Nick Florio

Elevating the Patient Experience: Two minutes at a Time

The Primary Care setting can feel like a fast-paced, problem-oriented experience for patients, especially during COVID. Patients are ushered into the exam room where a nurse or medical assistant gathers information about the patient's chief complaint, current medications, and vital signs. When the physician comes in the patient's concerns are assessed and together they develop a treatment plan. This plan often requires continued care, whether it is going to the pharmacy, or referral to a specialist or PT.



Our Community project involves direct patient education, the “Two Minute Teach.” We provide instruction for a mindful breathing exercise, with the intention of elevating the patient's experience in order to bridge the gap between assessment and implementation of the treatment plan.



Mindful Breathing
Can Improve:

Blood Pressure

Heart Rate Variability

Pain Tolerance

Depression & Anxiety

Symptoms of PTSD

Insomnia

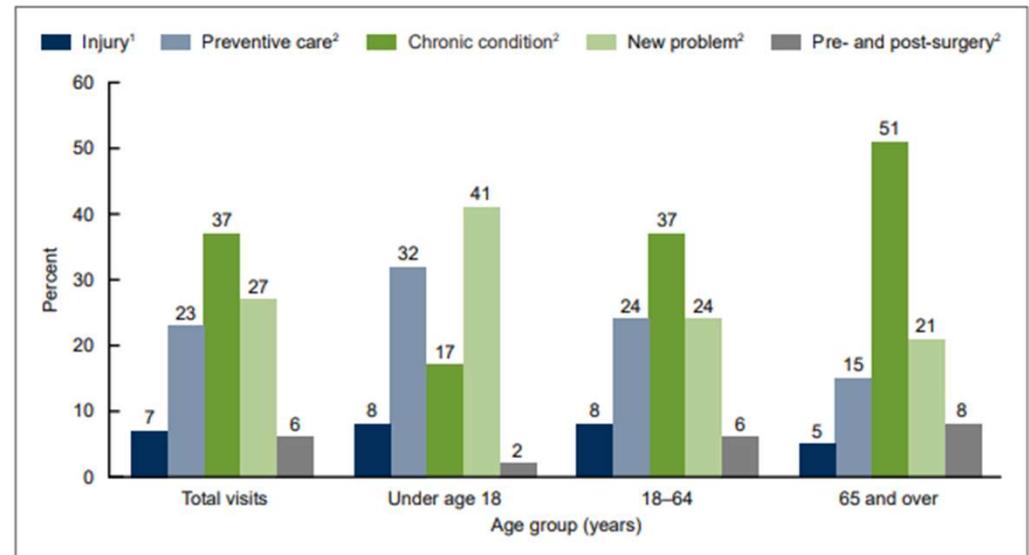
Digestion

Demographics

According to a 2016 CDC Survey, most Americans visit a physician's office for 1 of 5 reasons:

1. A chronic condition (37%)
2. A new problem (27%)
3. Preventative Care (23%)
4. An injury (7%)
5. Pre- or Post-Surgery care (6%)

Figure 3. Major reason for office-based physician visit, by age: United States, 2016



Healthcare providers can focus not only on providing guidance for what ails our patients, but also expanding their awareness of what it means to live a full and healthy life. A patient's overall health can be influenced by providing them with tools to recognize not only what is wrong with them, but to appreciate what is going well.

To this end, we recommend including a mindfulness assessment as part of routine intake. This not only benefits the patient by arming them with tools that have proven health benefits, It also benefits the patient-provider relationship, allowing a more patient-centered approach to developing a health improvement and maintenance plan.

Community Perspectives

Implementing something as simple as two-minutes of mindfulness is actually quite complicated. Removing obstacles quickly became our goal: we eliminated a teaching pamphlet, we simplified the survey (from 10 questions to 4), we figured out the timing, and we clarified the method. We pared the project down to something simple enough to be implemented in under 5 minutes. The risks were minimal, and the benefits were intriguing enough to support. That's when providers came back with enthusiastic responses.

"Any opportunity spent with a patient engaged in a mindful activity is worth your time, and will bring benefit both to the patient and to you, as the healthcare provider."

- Dr. Jeremiah Eckhaus, UVM Health Network - CVMC

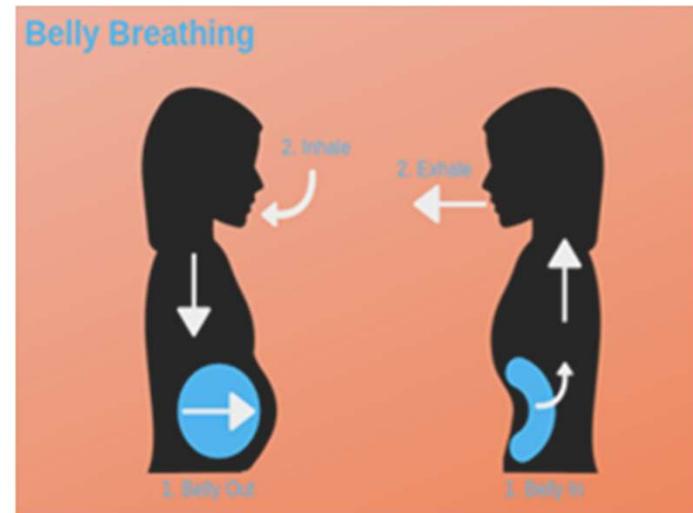
"Offering primary care patients breathing instructions before seeing the physician might benefit these patients in terms of *white coat syndrome* and *general anxiety*, which both impact patients in the primary care setting in a significant way."

- Dr. Nick Florio, Ridgefield Primary Care - Nuvance Health

Intervention and Methodology

During the rooming process, the medical student will spend a few minutes with the patient in order to accomplish three tasks:

1. Pre-Survey (patient self-assessment)
2. 2-Minute Teach: Belly Breathing
3. Post-Survey (health outcomes)



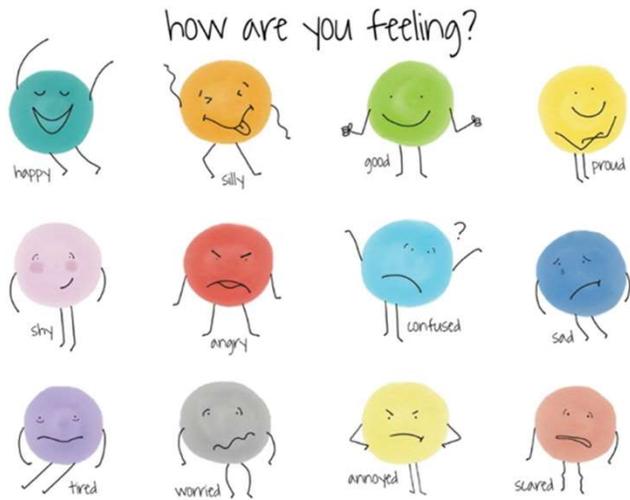
Key Techniques:

1. Focus on the **ABDOMEN** moving **IN/OUT**.
2. Focus on the **EXHALE**.

Pre-Survey

1. What is your primary purpose for coming to the doctor's office?
- A chronic condition
 - A new problem
 - Preventative Care
 - An injury
 - Pre- or Post-Surgery care

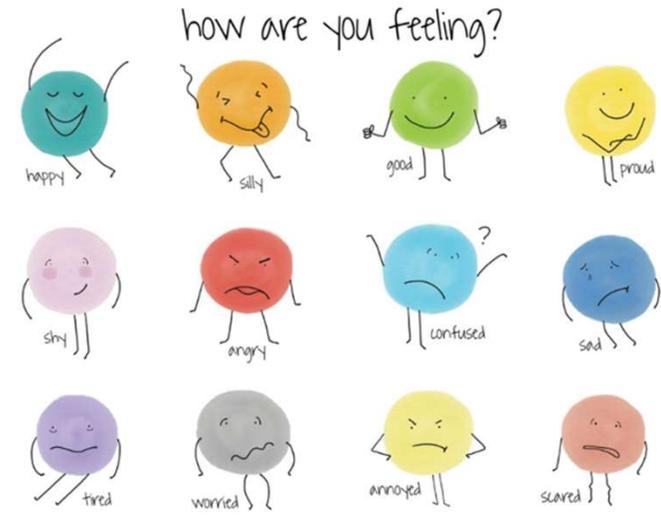
2. How do you feel today? Circle all the apply:



Two-Minutes of Breathing Post-Survey

3. Was this your first experience with "mindful breathing"?
- Yes
 - No

4. How do you feel AFTER two minutes of mindful breathing?



Results and Reflections



This project started with a seed of hopeful intervention: *What can we as medical students bring to our respective medical practices that would be of benefit?* Both of us have backgrounds that help ground medicine in the basics: food and breath. This seed grew into a concept: *How can we engage with patients in a way that adds something nourishing and meaningful to their doctor's visit?* As we sought feedback from providers and professionals, we realized that we needed to reign our idea in. The concept began to clarify into "the Two-Minute Teach," which was more personal and more manageable. Rather than revolutionize the way a patient experiences the visit to the doctor's office, we focused on a small, measurable, concrete activity. Our seed became something tangible: a survey that would provide us with evidence for the efficacy of our intervention. From seed to concept to clarity!

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Implementation of the Survey would provide data about the effectiveness of our “Two-Minute Teach.” If there is data that supports the effectiveness of mindful breathing as a means to feeling better, further study would be warranted.

Limitations

Given that this project was limited in both time and COVID related restrictions, we did not go through the IRB approval process. Therefore we could not implement this intervention directly to patients.

The COVID limitations forced us to narrow the scope of this to begin with. Originally we had envisioned a pre-survey for patients to fill out in the waiting room.

Due to time constraints, we were unable to get approval for a pamphlet to hand out to patients doing this exercise. We therefore left all of the information for the pamphlet in slides 5B-D, which should ideally be heavily edited to the appropriate audience.

Recommendations/what's next..

Understanding that practitioners are overwhelmed with their own agenda and job requirements, we believe that it would be most beneficial to avoid burdening the practitioners, and instead try to focus on the patient directly.

Here are some suggestions of what might be useful:

- A pamphlet that the patient can take home as an easy to use guide on mindfulness
- A poster to hang in practitioner waiting rooms, so that the patient can work on mindfulness even before seeing their practitioner
- A partnership with mindfulness practitioners and links to their work via website / social media etc.
- Go through IRB approval and implement this project.

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