

“Mindfulness for Residency” Elective for 4th – Year Medical Students

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Introduction

Background:

- Burnout and well-being are significant concerns in the medical field, including medical school.
- This requires change at systematic, organization, and individual levels.
- Mindfulness interventions have been helpful for medical students in the pre-clinical setting.
- The fourth year of medical school presents unique stressors which have not been studied in the context of mindfulness, such as clinical rotations and preparing for the Match and residency.

This project evaluates a new for-credit elective for fourth-year medical students (M4s) to teach mindfulness practices with an emphasis of preparing for residency.

Course Content:

- Virtual, synchronous platform with new topic weekly

Week 1: Introduction, Evidence, Reflection

Week 2: Contemplative Movement & 3-part Body Scan

Week 3: Mindful Listening & Speaking

Week 4: Walking Meditation & Walking Mindfully

Week 5: Seated Stretching & Caring Moments

Week 6: Self-Compassion

Week 7: Loving Kindness Meditation

Week 8: Intro to Qigong Standing Movements

Week 9: Thoughts are not Facts, Resilience as a Skill

Week 10: Debrief & Reflect, Communication & Advocacy

Methods

Quantitative Measures:

- *Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)*
 - Subscales: Observing, Describing, Acting with Awareness, Nonjudging, Nonreactivity
 - ↑ scores= ↑ mindfulness in everyday life
 - Administered at start and end of course
 - Analysis: paired t-test
- *Weekly Surveys- Likert scale questions*
 - Assessed feeling heard, safe, familiarity with mindfulness, relevance to life, and intentions to practice mindfulness.

Qualitative Measures:

- Focus groups
- Free-response questions in weekly surveys
- Independently reviewed and coded, with cumulative themes identified from final group codebook.

Qualitative Results

Theme 1: Defining Mindfulness

- “[Getting] off autopilot”
- “Paying attention in the moment... on purpose without judgement”
- “Slowing down and ... connection with your emotions and understanding how they’re impacting your day beyond... a surface level”

Theme 3: Common Difficulties

- *Initial struggle*: “I... assumed... I am just not the type of person that this works for [because I didn’t feel like I was doing well early on]”
- *Vulnerability*: “we don’t [necessarily] know each other all that personally well, so it’s hard to open up about like different things and anxieties”
- *Focus*: “I found it difficult to clear my mind”
- *Logistics*: “setting aside time for mindfulness,” “sitting still...on camera”

Theme 2: Helpful Skills

- *Guided practices*: “Having somebody walk you through it the first time and then, repeatedly over a matter of weeks really helped solidify some of those skills.
- *Naming emotion*: “I’ve learned it is okay to have and recognize [negative] thoughts and emotions and they don’t define me.”
- *Small practices*: “breaking it down and finding practices that I can incorporate and practice in my day more easily and more readily”

Theme 4: Connection to Self

- *Internal Observation*: “more aware of how I am feeling both physically and mentally and... able to address those feelings in real time.
- [I’m]...more aware of my reactivity and being able to be more aware of my behavior and modify it or just recognize my emotions and allow them but not to let them take over.”

Theme 5: Connection to Others

- *Personal Connection*: “In...family situations, it’s been a little richer, and I’m noticing things that I didn’t necessarily pay attention to when I’m just in the middle of a routine that I do everyday, and it’s really fun to notice something that brings joy, that is always there, you just didn’t notice it.”
- *Finding community*: [being with] people that are... very intentional and motivated [about mindfulness] has been... impactful, and [I hope] it’s something I can continue [in residency].

Theme 6: Clinical Application for Residency

- “I’m sort of using mindfulness to gain physical awareness in addition to emotional awareness, and I think that’s been useful in improving that performance [such as] increased dexterity and situational awareness in the operating room I think would be super useful.”
- “Whenever I walk into the clinical interaction, I’m always kind of taking inventory of what I’m ...bringing into the room with me, and how that might...influence how I interact with that person during the interaction itself, I’m also ... a little bit more aware of sort of my internal state and ... how that’s playing into the situation”
- During my sub-I...I remember just being exhausted like seeing one patient to the next, but like with the [mindfulness] class, I started doing a mindful walk...I was breathing before going into patients rooms, [...] I was paying a little more attention to the hallways, just ... taking it slow.”

Discussion

- Weekly survey scores→ students liked the course with increasing satisfaction each week.
- FFMQ scores did not change overall.
 - Increases in “Observing” and “Nonreactivity” subscales align with self-reported ability to recognize internal state and manage response.
- The increase in “observing” may explain decreased scores in “Nonjudgment” and “Acting with Awareness,” as students were more aware of how judgmental they were towards themselves, or how “unaware” they may have been acting.
- Focus group and free-response data→ students had an improved understanding of mindfulness and deeper connections to themselves and others.
- Key areas suggest significant potential for applicability of mindfulness in transition to residency

These results suggest this course filled a gap in student learning and provided new skills which could benefit them in a variety of ways.

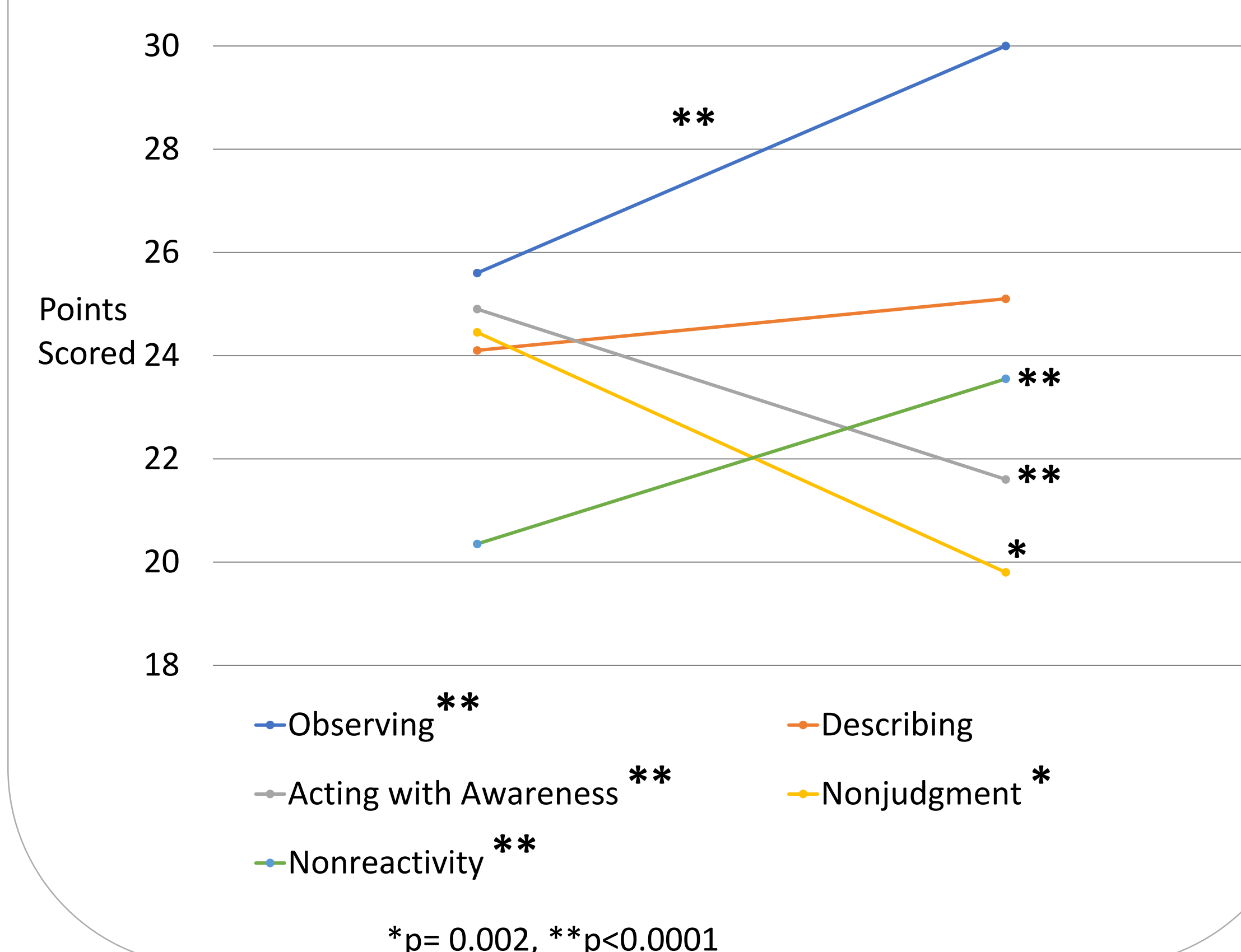
Acknowledgements

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Quantitative Results

No change in pre- vs post-course total FFMQ score.

Figure 1: Variable changes in post-course subscale scores



Increase in weekly survey scores over time.

Figure 2: Overall response score increased each week

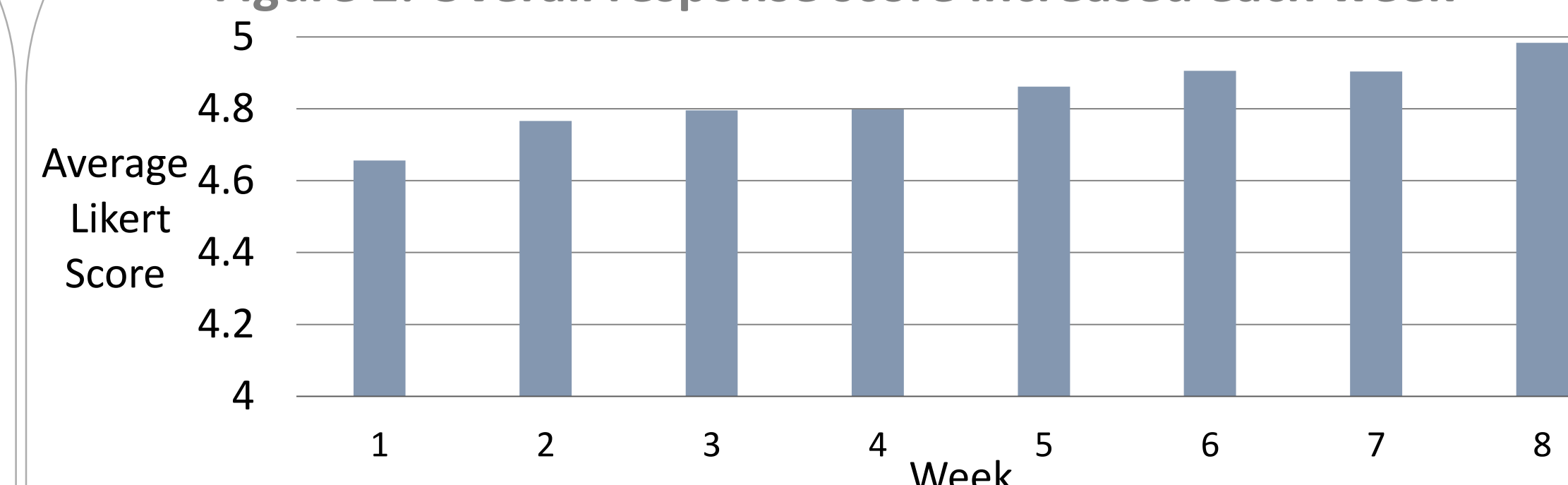


Figure 3: Individual question scores increased over time

