

described by Eric Cassell in *The Healer's Art* (1976) and further developed by Michael Kearney in *A Place of Healing* (2000). Curing is an eradication or a change in the disease state induced primarily by the physician's exertions. Healing is a response shift in the person healed toward a sense of integrity and wholeness. The energy for healing comes from the patient, although the process may be facilitated by a deep and supportive relationship with a health care worker. Stimulated in part by the success of alternative medical practitioners, physicians are beginning to rediscover healing as an important part of what society wants from them. The challenge is that the qualities required for curing and healing are different and even contradictory. For instance, as Cassell has written, in the curing mode the physician focuses on what the patient shares in common with other patients with the same disease, while in the healing mode he or she pays attention to the unique characteristics and context of the patient. But can a normal person pay attention in two contradictory ways at the same time? Are we asking too much of physicians and other health care workers?

I suspect that we are not asking enough. I believe that most health care workers are capable of being fully present to their patients as professionals and as whole human beings. For myself I realize in retrospect that is why I got into medicine in the first place. And, surprisingly, living in accordance with our real and often challenging values may be less stressful than the alternative.³ I agree with Kabat-Zinn that techniques for cultivating mindfulness are central to this deeper interpretation of the health care mandate. But there is probably more to it than simply learning a technique. Buddha, the originator of mindfulness, gave up all of his material possessions and took to the road with his begging bowl. Our shaman precursors went through a near-death experience or psychotic episode before they were

qualified for practice. What is the equivalent for 21st-century physicians? Perhaps it is a question that each physician needs to ask himself or herself: What do you need to give up, or what commitment do you need to make to bring the full force of your attention to the practice of medicine? And maybe healing is a question that physicians need to explore for themselves and for their patients: What would it take for you to come home to yourself? This, I believe, is the arrival T.S. Eliot was talk-

ing about. Never left? Are you sure?

Tom A. Hutchinson

Director, McGill Programs
in Whole Person Care
Department of Oncology
McGill University
Montréal, Que.

References

1. Needleman J. *The way of the physician*. London: Arkana; 1985.
2. Bliss M. *William Osler: a life in medicine*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; 1999. p. 374.
3. Massimini F, Delle Fave A. Individual development in a bio-cultural perspective. *Am Psychol* 2000;55:24-33.

From prose into practice

The mindfulness meditation workshop with Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn is scheduled to run for three hours. The afternoon begins with a 20-minute guided meditation, followed by a question-and-comment session with the workshop's 250 participants. One hour into the afternoon's activities I realize there's very little new here. I'm almost ready to cut it short and begin my two-hour drive home.

We are mostly patients and former patients of the Tom Baker Cancer Centre in Calgary. Women in the audience outnumber men about eight to one. One middle-aged woman gratefully testifies to the power of meditation in helping her confront her breast cancer. A man asks Jon if he ever falls asleep while meditating.

Our speaker admits that he does get sleepy from time to time while sitting in meditation. He reminds us that, contrary to popular misconception, mindfulness meditation is not about achieving bliss or states of extraordinary calm or enlightenment. It's more about the simple, mundane struggle to remain awake in the present moment. *Simple* does not imply *easy*. Jon acknowledges real difficulties in being continually mindful. A woman in her fifties admits that she finds less time for meditation now that the crisis of cancer in her life has receded.

Be alive in the present moment. That exhortation is a recurring theme in Jon's writing. Was I expecting something more from the man himself? Surely this task by itself is sufficient for one workshop, if not for one lifetime. I make a mental note of my impatience and set it gently aside. As Jon says, the workshop is today's meditation. He then leads us in some quiet yoga stretching, followed by another short period of silent meditation. The final 30 minutes is devoted to more "conversation" between Jon and the participants.

Jon indicates he'll stay to answer any additional queries and also sign copies of his books. As I gather up my things and anticipate the late afternoon traffic, the title of his second book comes to mind: *Wherever You Go, There You Are*.

Vincent Hanlon

Emergency Physician
Lethbridge, Alta.