

Reclaim the Power of Connection: Lead in Balance for Well-Being

A 3-day Experiential Wellness Program for Healthcare Providers

“Find a place of rest in the middle of it all.”

Frank Ostaseski

In this workshop we aim to help physicians and other providers develop specific skills that will facilitate more meaningful and effective relationships with patients, colleagues, and team members, and a renewed sense of purpose and connection in their work.

Agenda

Day 1: 8 AM – 5 PM

Morning

Welcome, Introductions, Authentic community building agreements

Participants will review group values/agreements for conduct with each other, and the horses, during the workshop; these include focus on connection over perfection, confidentiality of other participants experiences, supportive atmosphere, no touching the horse with the whip, etc.

Experiential Activity: Introduction to the Body Scan

Participants will be introduced to, and experience, the body scan as an initial introduction to a mindful presence activity.

Horse Activity: Mutual Respect Exercise: Mastering Boundaries and Assertiveness

Setting and respecting boundaries is an essential skill for well-being, clear communication, mindful awareness, and healthy relationships. As healthcare providers we are under tremendous time pressures and may rush to examine a patient or sit too close while taking a history without noticing we are infringing on their personal space without permission. Conversely, as caring professionals, we may fail to appropriately set boundaries with patients or colleagues leading over time to anger, resentment, exhaustion, and burn-out. In this activity, participants develop awareness of, and respect for, the personal space that is required to allow a mutually respectful comfortable interaction with another. The emphasis is on the 90% of communication that is non-verbal. Participants will learn to project effective body language, as well as learn to notice and sense subtle, non-verbal communication from others. Horses, like people, have varying degrees of personal space needs- some horses are more sensitive to approach whereas others may be less sensitive and may in fact be good at pushing into people's personal space if they allow them. *This can be a useful reminder that setting and respecting boundaries is necessary to create a safe space and allow development of a mutually respectful trusting relationship with our patients and colleagues.* In addition, setting healthy boundaries can be important in maintaining a reasonable work schedule.

Didactic: Physician/Provider Burnout and Why Mindfulness Matters

This portion of the curriculum is didactic and covers the prevalence of burn-out in healthcare providers, potential contributing factors, and data from positive psychology studies looking at how we can increase our happiness with special attention to mindfulness.

Lunch (provided) 1 Hour

Afternoon

Didactic: Reconnecting with our Authentic Selves: An Inner State of Calm

The authentic self is our true self or true essence, marked by a high level of awareness, and choice in how we respond and act in the present moment. It is that part of us that contains our sense of connection to everything around us, our creativity, curiosity, intuition, and “joy of being.” As providers we may over-identify with our professional role or “ego” after spending years immersed in a hierarchical training system where reason and knowledge are valued over intuition, and mistakes are potentially deadly. We may become uncomfortable with uncertainty, believing our patients expect us to have all the answers. Our physician or provider role “programs” can become out of balance with other essential aspects of ourselves. In this session, we will explore how false self/authentic self relates to our job as healthcare providers and how we can regain or maintain access to our authentic selves while embracing our provider role.

Experiential Activity: Sensory Awareness Meditation

Participants will practice mindfulness by learning a meditation technique that focuses their awareness on the senses of hearing and touch, and accessing the present moment through this sensory process. This is a simple and very effective practice for developing calm presence and accessing “authentic self.”

Horse Activity: Exploring Connection

In this exercise a participant will be allowed to explore connection with a horse in a way that is meaningful to them using any of the skills from other exercises or in novel ways within reason. The concept of “intersubjective mindfulness” will be introduced. Many meditation practices are done alone and help us reduce our stress and bring peace of mind. However it is also important to practice mindfulness while interacting with another. Bringing a nonjudgmental awareness without distraction to our interaction with another fosters connection. In this activity, each horse and participant is different, and thus connection may look very different from one horse to the next, or from one participant or day to the next. Just as some horses enjoy being physically close, or scratched/stroked, others do not and may prefer to walk with or behind the participant, or simply stand together. Developing flexibility in how we connect with individuals is important in developing and maintaining relationships. Noticing and adjusting our behavior in response to nonverbal feedback (as practiced with the horses) can help us pick up on subtle cues from patients that will allow us to connect in a way that is comfortable to them. Developing and sustaining strong connections with patients is essential for reconnecting with the meaning in our work.

Experiential Activity: Introduction to Loving Kindness Meditation

Self-criticism and perfectionism correlate with high degrees of stress and psychological distress including depression. It is not surprising that medical training and the culture surrounding the practice of medicine fosters self-criticism and perfectionism. Studies show that the loving kindness meditation is effective at reducing depressive symptoms, increasing self-compassion, positive emotions, mindfulness, sense of purpose in life, social support, and decreasing

illness symptoms. In addition, regular practice of this meditation has been shown to activate and strengthen areas of the brain responsible for the ability to identify, understand and relate to the emotions and reactions of others, even when such emotional cues are not expressed explicitly. One of the most important benefits of developing empathy, is that it improves relationships. As mentioned before, one of the greatest predictors of long-term happiness is how deeply and meaningfully we feel connected to other people in our life. In this session, participants will learn a meditation that facilitates compassion for self and compassion for others.

Wrap Up/Closing

Day 2: 8 AM – 5 PM

Morning

Check-in/Questions from prior day

Experiential Activity: Loving Kindness Meditation practice session

Providers will be led in the practice of the loving kindness meditation to begin the day. Providers will be encouraged to think of a patient or colleague with whom they have experienced interpersonal conflict.

Didactic: 5 Roles for Effective Leadership in Personal and Professional Relationships*

Working effectively in healthcare requires being able to work as part of a greater team. Team members may include nurses, certified nurse's aides, other physicians, nurse practitioners, patients, and their families. Our patients look to us for guidance and expect us to be the leader of their healthcare team. We all benefit from leadership skills whether we are seeking to be better leaders in our personal lives, with our patients, within the institution, or our community.

Linda Kohanov, author, founder, and director of Eponaquest Worldwide, defined 5 roles that are useful in providing effective balanced leadership by studying nomadic pastoral tribes in Africa who successfully led herds of large long-horn cattle across the country and from observations of her own herd of horses. Each of these roles has gifts to facilitate more effective leadership but also challenges when used out of balance with the other roles. Using these roles *in balance* in our roles as healthcare providers can help us lead more effectively for our patients, our team, our institutions, and communities.

Horse Activity: Embodied Mindfulness and Connection in Action

This exercise draws together the body scan and a *respectful use of assertive energy* to achieve a specific goal. Participants will practice engaging two of the five roles for effective leadership, while achieving an assigned goal with a horse. As healthcare providers we have specific goals in mind for our patients but we may feel frustrated with our inability to motivate them to achieve the goal. Conversely, we may work with team members who are challenging to direct or motivate. In this exercise the provider will direct a horse around the round pen. This exercise serves as a metaphor for motivating a patient, team member or colleague to achieve a specific goal. Emphasis will be placed on maintaining a *positive and encouraging* assertive energy, clear communication, and commitment to inspire the horse to cooperate, followed by immediate positive feedback- authentic gratitude extended to the horse.

Lunch (provided) 1 hour

Afternoon

Didactic: Intro to the Emotional Message Chart: Understanding Emotions as Information

Emotional Intelligence is a well-studied determinant of success in relationships as well as careers. Emotional intelligence is often defined as the ability to identify and manage your emotions and the emotions of others. As neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor says “we are feeling beings who think.” However training for healthcare providers is so knowledge focused that providers may appear, or actually become, disconnected from their emotions. In this session providers will learn a method for effectively processing common emotions, the message they contain, how to respond in a productive way and then move on. Learning to respond productively to emotions such as anger, frustration, sadness, and grief is another skill which may help prevent burn-out over the course of a career.

Caveat: There are many definitions for different emotions. *The emotional message chart used in this workshop is designed with messages that can lead to productive action for greater social and emotional intelligence.* It is not the only way to define a particular emotion.

Intro to Coherent Breathing- the Power of Emotions and Paced Breathing

A state of physiologic coherence refers to a state of harmony within a living system, and in this case with the autonomic nervous system (ANS). Studies of this technique indicate synchronization of the two branches of the ANS with an overall shift in autonomic balance towards increased parasympathetic activity as well as increased synchronization between the heart and the brain. Psychophysiological coherence can be measured as a sine-wave like pattern in heart rate variability that is associated with positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and love. Conversely heart rhythm incoherence is associated with stress related emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and worry. Coherent breathing or “heart breathing” is a specific paced breathing technique combined with intentional generation of a heartfelt positive state. Positive and pleasant emotions appear to enable coherence to emerge. This technique was developed and studied by the Heart Math Institute. This state of “psychophysiological coherence” can be measured by EmWave monitors developed by the HeartMath Institute. These monitors measure the pattern of heart rate variability. Positive psychology studies looking at happiness show that focusing on gratitude can actually change our genetic set point for happiness. In this exercise participants will learn how to perform a coherent breathing technique while intentionally generating heartfelt positive state by thinking about something that induces gratitude, joy, or love. Monitors will be used to measure when they achieve a state of coherence. Interestingly, early studies indicate that horses are most likely to approach people when they are in this state of coherence showing the power that our emotions have on others. Participants will have the opportunity to practice this technique with the horses to experience for themselves the impact that achieving a positive emotional state can have on our interactions with others.

Sentient Communication Talk: The “Grammar” of Non-Verbal Communication

In this didactic presentation providers will learn the grammar of nonverbal communication in order to use it more consciously and purposefully to improve relationships with patients and colleagues. This talk will bring together many elements of mindfulness, and skills they learned with the horses. The concept of intersubjective mindfulness- paying attention to our self and another being at the same time- will be formally introduced as it applies to our practice as clinicians- whether in the clinic, the OR, or the hospital.

Wrap Up/Closing

Day 3: 8 AM – 5 PM

Morning

Welcome and Check-in

Didactic: Emotional Heroism and Approach to Difficult Conversations

The practice of medicine sometimes feels like a “contact sport.” Conflict inevitably arises, especially when stakes or emotions are high, and yet skills for dealing with conflict in a productive way are rarely formally taught. Emotional Heroism includes the ability to hold your ground when under attack without attacking back, the conviction to stay present in the midst of conflict and suffering, and the courage to feel your emotions and other’s emotions before taking thoughtful action. It takes a high degree of emotional intelligence. It requires courage, self-control, and power combined with compassion, accountability, and forgiveness. The facilitator will lead the group in a didactic lecture and discussion examining emotional heroism and how to increase our emotional heroism. Providers will learn to combine the assertive, calm, enthusiastic energy they used to direct the horse in the round pen with verbage (taught didactically) to approach conflict in ways that are productive and respectful of others. In this segment we will learn ways of handling verbal or emotional attacks in a non-reactive way while maintaining their position and asking thoughtful, problem solving questions.

Horse Activity: Leadership Through Relationship

In this activity, participants get to practice using four of the roles from the “5 roles for effective leadership” didactic presentation. Participants will use various steps to increase engagement, energy, and power with the goal of having the horse follow them freely at liberty (without a halter and lead rope), increasing connection and trust as a result. The horse experience will be processed in a period of guided reflection in which each participant will be encouraged to reflect on their leadership challenges with patients and colleagues and how they can more effectively encourage partnership to achieve mutual goals.

Afternoon

Didactic: Approach to Difficult Conversations

Leading effectively and maintaining healthy relationships for our well-being requires the skill and willingness to have challenging conversations. Participants will be given a structured format with which to approach a difficult conversation (see attached format). This format was developed by Linda Kohanov using input from Bob Wall in his book, “Coaching for Emotional Intelligence.” Participants will be asked to share an example of a difficult conversation they would like to have, and we will practice drafting a conversation using the structured format as a group. Each individual will be encouraged to write out a difficult conversation they need to have or perhaps already had but wish they could approach differently.

Didactic: Developing a Mindfulness Practice

In this interactive session we will discuss the importance of setting up a short daily mindfulness practice to continue the healthy well-being practices they have learned in the workshop. Barriers will be explored and addressed and participants will be given a list of resources for support.

Horse Activity: Merge the Herd

Having a sense of community and social connection is important for well-being. Participants will be invited to use any of the tools learned throughout the program to merge their “human herd” with the “horse herd” from the weekend. Participants will gain a felt sense of how the tools they’ve learned contribute to becoming part of a greater community, while also practicing intersubjective mindfulness.

Wrap Up/Closing

**Much of the material for this course was originally developed by Linda Kohanov, founder and director of Eponaquest and author of five books, and is used with her permission.*