



STANISLAUS COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND RECOVERY SERVICES

# CULTURAL COMPETENCY UPDATE

...a newsletter to address cultural issues that enable us to effectively work in cross cultural situations.

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## Mindfulness

Colette West, BHS II

*"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response, lies our growth and our freedom"*

*-Viktor E. Frankl, Neurologist, Psychiatrist, Holocaust Survivor-*

Recently, opportunity was provided to attend BHRS training by Dorbea Carey, on Mindfulness. It was both thought provoking and exciting. Dorbea presented definitions from Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, Scientist, "Mindfulness: paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally".



**BHRS Cultural Competence, Equity and Social Justice Committee meets on the 2nd Monday of each month from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in the Redwood Room, 800 Scenic Drive**

Dorbea Carey shared that recent studies performed at Harvard University, using MRI, proved that meditation 27 minutes per day over an eight week period literally increases the brains gray matter in the parts of the brain where it is most needed.

Participants in the study were practicing mindfulness exercises, and this is all it took to stimulate a major increase in gray matter density in the hippocampus, the part of the brain connected with self-awareness, compassion and introspection.

Per Sue McGreevey, a Harvard Medical School Instructor "Participant-reported reductions in stress also were correlated with decreased gray-matter density in the amygdala, which is known to play an important role in anxiety and stress. None of these changes were seen in the control group".

In other words; simple mindfulness meditation is effective to reform and strengthen the brain construct, increasing resilience and cognition. The amazing thing is that the simple act of disciplining thoughts for 27 minutes daily, expanded into increased focus, alertness, and clarity of thought throughout the remainder of the day, much like a brisk walk will do.

Dorbea led attendees to practice different types of mindfulness meditation, including walking meditation, and an eating meditation. The basic breathing meditation is as simple as finding a quiet space and an alert position in which to focus. Direct your attention to your own breathing, while gently counting exhalations. Your thoughts will skip away to something else, as is normal. Simply non-judgmentally bring your attention back to counting your exhalations. Yes, this is the exercise.

Dorbea Carey shared that for some folks, 6% or so, counting breaths can lead to distracted un-natural breathing and recommends they instead focus on the body, or practice walking meditation.

Know that the brain is alive! This is what Neuroplasticity is about. Our brains are live-wired, not hard-wired. By spending time training the brain to stay focused on counting exhalations, we can build strength of focus, and improve attention in all aspects of life.

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