

Yoga-Informed Mindfulness-Based Risk Management (YMRM) in Healthcare: A Novel Integrated Approach Incorporating Stress Management through Yoga and Mindfulness

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Abstract

Risk is a part and parcel of life. Healthcare deals with people's lives and health and hence risk is inherent in any organization providing a healthcare service. Effective risk management is hence an essential part of a healthcare delivery system. The Risk Manager therefore assumes a key position ensuring health, safety, efficiency, growth and progress of the organization itself. This article first briefly reviews the key concepts of risk management in healthcare. Stress management and its basic principles is then covered briefly. It also incorporates practical advice on stress management. Yoga as a practice and lifestyle is briefly reviewed. Mindfulness and mindfulness-based approach is described. A simple practise session for Yoga-informed Mindfulness-Based Risk Management (YMRM) is described. The article concludes with the proposal that Yoga-informed Mindfulness-based Risk Management (YMRM) is a practical tool and should be an essential component of an integral approach to effective risk management and improved organizational efficiency.

Keywords: Risk Management, Healthcare, Stress, Stress Management, Yoga, Mindfulness

1. Introduction

"Risk comes from not knowing what you are doing."
– Warren Buffett, American business magnate, investor, and philanthropist

For any individual or organization safety is a basic necessity. Healthcare organization and its people are exposed to risks at several levels. It is therefore important that healthcare organizations have Risk

Managers who are trained in the general principles of risk in all its aspects.

Risk can exist at the following levels and therefore safety needs can be prioritized as:

- Patient care
- Staff
- Workplace
- Finance

Out of this, in a healthcare organization patient care is paramount. [1]

2. The Role of a Healthcare Risk Manager

Healthcare Risk Managers have to be trained to handle multiple and divergent issues in multiple settings:

- Psychological and human healthcare
- Event and incident management
- Financing, insurance, and claims management
- Clinical research
- Emergency preparedness

Risk managers have to work in a proactive and controlled reactive manner in order to prevent an incident from occurring or minimize the damage due to an event. Risk management entails identifying risks and evaluating risks as a means to reduce injury and minimize damage to patients, staff members, and visitors and the organization itself within the healthcare organization. [1][4]

3. Risk Management Planning

The long-term effects can be very significant if the healthcare organization has not planned and prepared for risk management of potential issues. Negligence in having comprehensive risk management plans in multiple areas in place can compromise patient care, increase liability risks, and result in financial loss for the healthcare organization. Potential risks therefore have to be evaluated and measured. This has to be in terms of their potential negative impact on various aspects of the organization. Based on the comprehensive risk assessment, an organization-specific management plan should be developed, standardized, implemented, and strictly monitored.

4. The Risk Management Plan

Every organization has its own unique challenges in terms of risk. Therefore there is no one-size-fits-all model of risk management. The challenges faced by managers are varied and many times unpredictable. But broadly areas that should be addressed in a risk assessment plan should include but are not limited to:

- Patient safety
- Mandatory government regulations
- Potential medical error
- Existing and future policy
- Legislation impacting the field of healthcare
- Finance

4.1 Evidence-Based Risk Management Practice

Developing and implementing healthcare risk management program should be based on thorough and robust research. The research has to be ongoing and the Risk Manager has to stay up-to-date with the latest evidence for good practice. He/she should also initiate and actively promote research in the healthcare organization.

4.2 Case Example of Risk and Evidence-Based Risk Management

Let us take this example of a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association - JAMA Internal Medicine:

Sanjay V. Desai, MD; Leonard Feldman, MD; Lorrel Brown, MD, et al: Effect of the 2011 vs 2003 Duty Hour Regulation—Compliant Models on Sleep Duration, Trainee Education, and Continuity of Patient Care Among Internal Medicine House Staff: A Randomized Trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine* Vol. 173 (Issue 8), pp. 649-655 (2013)

This study looked at Residents in teaching hospitals who were overworked and a common complaint was lack of enough sleep time. The study found that increasing the hours of sleep the Residents received in teaching hospitals actually compromised patient safety!

So the risk-management outcome in this case was to ensure that strategies were developed and were in place to improve Residents' sleep schedules and thereby reduce the potential risks to patients. [9]

4.3 Risk Analysis

Risk analysis should become a part of the everyday practice of the risk manager. Various organizations have developed standards of what is essential and have provided guidelines. These are very well established in most developed countries.

There are also specialist organizations for Risk Managers. Based on information provided from other resources, managers should conduct organization-specific risk analyses to determine potential risks.

The risk analysis should identify:

- What could possibly happen?
- How likely is something to happen (measuring risk)?
- How severe will the outcome be if something did happen?
- How can the likelihood something will happen be mitigated on the forefront and to what degree?
- What can be done to reduce the impact (and to what degree)?
- What is the potential for exposure or what cannot be proactively avoided?

4.4 Risk Management Plan of Action

Using the results of the analysis, risk managers can then compare the likelihood of different adverse events along with their impacts. They can then rank the potential risks in terms of their severity. Risk Management Plans for mitigating risks and handling them adequately and appropriately can then be developed. Risk management plans also undergo quality assessments and audit. This is so that the interventions and actions proposed are addressed as real potential issues. Once a good strategy is in place, it is monitored and modified as needed. [4]

4.5 Risk Management Strategies

Although avoiding potential financial consequences is one main concern in a healthcare organization, patient needs generally take top priority. Risk management strategies are specific to the organization and the situations the organization commonly encounters. Some broad risk management strategies that can be generally applied are [1][4]:

- Training physicians and staff
- Clear and effective communication culture among staff
- Counselling service for staff
- Competency assessments
- Continuing Professional Development program
- Thorough documentation
- Incident reporting protocol
- Line management
- Health and safety procedures
- Audit
- Finance management
- Effective insurance and claims management

4.6 Risk Management and Stress

The work of a risk manager is multidisciplinary. This therefore is a high responsibility work. This can lead to stretching of the managers personal physical and psychological resources. Therefore a risk manager should also be a stress manager for himself/herself. Becoming aware of personal capacities and limitations is very important. A risk manager is in a position where he or she has to handle stressful situations for himself/herself and also of others.

4.7 Stress Management

Coping with stress involves slowly changing our responses to situations, events and people from negative reactions and no actions to positive actions. Reactions are usually responses to feelings. It is usually not rational. We react so as to avoid unpleasant feelings. Thus we get habituated to this response. When we start becoming aware and mindful of our feelings and reactions by observing them, then we can train ourselves in controlling them and converting them to positive actions. By changing our thinking and applying our thought make us proactive.

4.8 Practical Techniques of Stress Management for Risk Managers

There are common sense ways of managing stress which when consciously and methodically applied can go a long way in combating the high stress situations that a Risk Manager may find himself/herself in. The following is a list of what a Risk Manager can do in his/her daily life [10]:

- **Pacing:** Schedules need to be well paced to accommodate for one's capacity and ability.
- **Planning:** Having a timetable or plan for each day so that things are reasonably predictable.
- **Prioritizing:** Deciding and delineating what can be done, when, and how in the order of need and necessity.
- **Persistence:** Continuing firmly and steadfastly despite hindrances
- **Patience:** Giving ourselves enough time and being flexible to change in situations
- **Positive Attitude:** Curbing negative self-talk, and developing one's sense of humour.
- **Organization:** Being systematic and focussed in our thinking and work
- **Time-Out:** Taking periodic breaks during the day to move, stretch and relax.
- **Exercise:** This can improve agility, performance and efficiency in coping.
- **Yoga:** A personal yoga practice is important in order to teach the skill to others.
- **Diet:** Regular well balanced and nutritious diet is necessary to keep the body systems to work well.
- **Sleep:** Cultivating good sleep hygiene.
- **Variety:** Occasional unscheduled variations in the routine, breaks the monotony and gives novelty making the day interesting.
- **Connection:** Receiving the support of family and friends with humility and gratitude and trying not to be too demanding of others, but at the same time not hesitating to ask for help or delegate work.
- **Communication:** Needs and feelings have to be communicated in order to let others know how one feels so they understand and can support appropriately.

4.9 The Science and Practice of Yoga and Mindfulness

Yoga as a practice dates back to very ancient times. It has its origins in the cultural and spiritual traditions of ancient India. At present the practice of yoga is popular as a physical fitness program popularized through various postural gymnastics called asana, breathing exercises called pranayama and meditation. Yoga has been subject to scientific study and there is now available a large body of evidence-based data proving the effectiveness of yoga in health. A key concept of yoga especially relevant to healthcare and particularly risk management is Mindfulness. [7]

Mindfulness is a concept developed from the ancient yoga philosophy and meditation traditions of India especially Vedic and Buddhist lifestyle practices. Mindfulness is considered as a way of life. Mindfulness is the skill of being aware of the present and 'being' in the present from moment to moment. It can be learned and developed through training and practice. Such a skill has been shown to have profound positive outcomes in as diverse fields as learning and leadership to chronic pain management, physical and mental health. [6][8]

Several brain electrophysiological and neuroimaging studies have shown that yoga-derived practices and mindfulness-based programs produce measurable and objective changes in brain physiology and structures indicating positive neuroplasticity leading to improved attention, impulse control, enhanced perceptual abilities, improved cognitive processing and executive abilities of the brain. [7]

4.10 Yoga and Mindfulness for Healthcare Professionals: Implications for Risk Management

Healthcare professionals face a demanding work environment which can compromise health and safety of the individual and also affect the quality of care for patients. Such a situation is directly linked to stress and burnout among healthcare professionals. This can thus potentially contribute to an increase in risk and hence a matter of concern for the risk manager. Studies of Yoga-informed stress management and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programs for healthcare professionals has found beneficial effects on both physical and mental health.

Yoga practice combined with mindfulness brings about greater flexibility, positive affect, greater awareness of the environment and oneself and greater control over ones responses. Regular

practice helps improve focus, gain clarity of thinking and improved decision making capacity. This translates into better efficiency and quality of patient care and thus minimization of risk.

Collective mindfulness in an organization is seen as an effective risk management strategy for an organization. Thus when a yoga-informed mindfulness-based program is incorporated into the standard operating procedure of the healthcare organization it has the potential for an effective risk management strategy with benefits in several organizational outcomes. [3][4]

4.11 Yoga-Informed Mindfulness-Based Practice for Risk Management in a Healthcare Organization

Onsite stress management and wellness programs are being increasingly offered in organizations. Studies have shown the overall benefit in terms of organizational efficiency, employee relationships and improved productivity. In recent times healthcare organizations also offer personal development programs for healthcare professionals. The following is a recommendation of a simple program for stress management with risk management in view. [5]

It is recommended that there be a half-an-hour sessional program daily in the mid-morning organized for the healthcare employees of the organization. The program should be voluntary and every employee is provided the opportunity to attend and be allowed to access the program. This can be made a part of their personal development program and team building activity package with risk management as an inherent outcome.

The session can be led by the Risk Manager with adequate knowledge of stress, stress management and training in yoga, mindfulness and experience in facilitation of a group session in Yoga-Informed Mindfulness-Based Practice. Such a training can be arranged by a healthcare professional in psychological medicine with training and experience in this field. The feasibility of such a training to professionals through a short training course has been demonstrated in similar areas.

Each session can begin with a basic introduction to risk management, stress and stress management, impact on personal and organizational health and wellbeing. The benefits of the program for personal health, organizational efficiency and risk reduction

are highlighted. The sessions are made interactive, lively and enjoyable.

This is followed by a short prayer and a slow warm-up routine called *sukshma-vyayama* or subtle exercise. Conscious and careful slow deliberate movements are made of all the major joints from head to toes. This may be completed in three to four minutes.

Asana practice is very slow movement exercise involving stretching with synchronized deep breathing. One such popular routine with a set of postures is called *suryanamaskara* or sun salutation. Two cycles of this should be good and can be completed in about five minutes.

This is followed by simple pranayama or deep diaphragmatic breathing exercise. The group sits comfortably on the floor or on chairs. A hand is placed on the abdomen and another on the chest. Slow deep breathing is performed by inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. One tries to maintain the focus on the breath throughout. This can be practiced for about five minutes and increased to about 10 minutes.

This activity is followed by Mindfulness Meditation. One has to sit comfortably. The group is instructed to bring the mind's attention to the sensation of air entering and leaving the nose. The group is encouraged to keep the focus on this sensation. If the mind wanders, the instruction is to just observe that it has wandered, without judging, bringing the attention back to the breath. Each time the mind wanders, the above is repeated. The practice can be done for about five minutes initially and then extended to 10 minutes.

The session is concluded with feedback, questions and clarifications, sharing of the experience and finally a group activity like singing.

By doing this yoga-informed mindfulness-based practice, each practitioner is breaking the habit of the mind to be absent minded, avoiding discomfort, yielding to procrastination and be attracted to trivial and negative thoughts and sensations, and willfully training the body and mind to be more connected with the present. The practice with time improves awareness, concentration, tolerance and patience and helps calm the mind naturally bringing greater clarity into what is happening in the present and so enabling clarity of thought and better decision making. [7][8]

5. Conclusion

Risk management should be an integral part of the healthcare organizational system. An effective risk manager is indispensable and can play a key role in the effective functioning of the healthcare organization. Stress is a basic factor that can contribute to human inefficiency and errors in an organization. Hence effective stress management can change the working efficiency of the healthcare personnel. Having an evidence-based stress management program incorporating yoga-informed mindfulness-based practice, under the coordination and leadership of the healthcare risk manager, can contribute to effective risk management and improved organizational efficiency. An integrated and novel approach presented here termed Yoga-informed Mindfulness-based Risk Management (YMRM) can potentially have long-term beneficial effects for the overall health, safety and development of the healthcare organization.

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