

## MINDFUL CONNECTIONS #1 – CRAIG HASSED

This is the first in a series of EPAL newsletters devoted to the presentations made at the Grampians Regional Palliative Care Team conference at Creswick on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of May this year. The conference theme was “Mindful Connections”, and the invited speakers bridged the gap between self and the other – on the one hand the Venerable Robina Courtin spoke about Buddhism as the “oldest form of psychotherapy” and meditation as a mechanism for growth, and at the other we had a marvellous presentation from Josephine Clayton, giving a great overview of the evidence base for and the practice of good communication.

Dr Craig Hased, the Deputy Head of Monash University’s Department of General Practice, spoke of mindfulness and its role in palliative care. He began by pointing out that although the human mind is by nature a wanderer, people whose mind does not wander from what they are doing report the greatest happiness. The mind and body are not separate, and it is therefore not surprising that there is evidence of a direct effect of mind states on the physiological, hormonal, immunological, metabolic and even genetic makeup of our bodies. These effects will have an effect on survival with cancer. He gave examples such as the effects of coping and depression on cancer survival. He also gave examples of the effects of chronic stress in increasing cortisol levels, which in turn have been shown to have a higher mortality in breast cancer<sup>1</sup>.

But what is mindfulness, exactly? Craig explained it not by referring to ancient Buddhist practices, but to our own European culture and to a definition given in 1890 by one of the early fathers of psychology, William James:

*“The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is compos sui (master of himself) if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.”*

Many examples of the effect of the mind on body function were given, and Craig introduced to me the specialty of psychoneuroimmunology – the study of the emotions, the brain, and the immune system. One example he gave was melatonin, a hormone produced by the pineal gland that has profound and multiple effects on the body, including some postulated anti-tumour effects. There have been several randomised controlled trials (RCTs) showing that melatonin may be useful in treating cancers. Melatonin production by the brain is increased with meditation.

Personally I think it may be too early to be sure that these body hormones will play a big part in anti-cancer treatment, but I’m sure that this area of research is very likely to bring us to important new understandings about the relationship between the brain, the mind, the body, and cancer.

Craig went on to talk about a related subject – mindfulness and craving. It is no longer controversial to claim that our behaviours and cravings put us at risk. We only have to think of smoking and excessive eating! Craig explained that the use of mindfulness based techniques of treatment are very useful in the management of these problems, and gave a surprising example of the Ornish study, in which a lifestyle intervention composed of diet, exercise, stress management and support group made a great difference to the chance of disease progression. In a 2 year follow-up, 27% of a control group progressed, but only 5% of those who underwent the lifestyle changes. I wonder which aspect of the several changes was the one that made the difference, or could it have been the combination of them all?

Maybe most of us who care for people who are sick and dying need no reminding of the relationship between the mind and body. We notice it every day – but this presentation was very stimulating and provided evidence for possible mechanisms which were very surprising and suggest some exciting new ways to look at ourselves. Thank you Craig.

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<sup>1</sup> Sephton SE, Sapolsky RM, Kraemer HC, Spiegel D. Diurnal cortisol rhythm as a predictor of breast cancer survival. J Natl Cancer Inst. 2000 Jun 21;92(12):994-1000

## THE MANAGEMENT OF SUBCUTANEOUS INFUSIONS IN PALLIATIVE CARE – EDUCATION WEBSITE LAUNCH

The *Management of Subcutaneous Infusions in Palliative Care* website is part of an education package for those working in palliative and end of life care, developed by the Centre for Palliative Care Research and Education (CPCRE) for Palliative Care Australia and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA). The site [www.health.qld.gov.au/cpcre/subcutaneous](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/cpcre/subcutaneous) includes sections on equipment, medications, trouble-shooting, and patient and family education. CPCRE's *Guidelines for Subcutaneous Infusion Device Management in Palliative Care* are available on the site for download, as well as posters and a patient and family education booklet. The education package is part of the \$2.38 million DoHA funded equipment replacement program which provided 887 new infusion devices for 187 rural and regional community services providing end of life care.

### MINDFUL CONNECTIONS CONFERENCE WHAT A CELEBRATION IN THE GRAMPIANS REGION!

The Grampians Regional Palliative Care Team (GRPCT) presented the Mindful Connections Conference at the Novotel Forest Resort, Creswick on the 5th & 6th of May 2011.

More than 220 people attended over two days, including the pre-conference Master Classes and a Conference Dinner. The conference aimed to provide a unique opportunity for local, regional and state delegates to hear from leading researchers and practitioners in a program of world-class keynote lectures.

The calibre of speakers was extraordinary and all the speakers fitted in perfectly with the mindfulness and communication theme. I must say that having Venerable Robina Courtin present as our key note speaker was memorable (see photo attached – I'm the tall one!). The other highlights for me were Shyla Bauer's beautiful photographs from all over the world 'To Live, To Love and To Leave a Legacy'. Effie's 'Human Rooms' was also an interesting look at different ways in which we can fill spaces in our mind. And who could forget the massage therapists. Don't tell anyone but I had two!

Overall the conference was a great success due to fantastic presenters and generous sponsors along with the wonderful support, attendance and contribution made by health care professionals from throughout the Grampians region and beyond.

Please feel free to go to [www.grampianspalliativecare.com.au](http://www.grampianspalliativecare.com.au) GRPCT site, Conference tab to view podcasts of the presentations. You might like to also start up a discussion about mindfulness on our discussion board about some of the issues that were raised at the conference. Look forward to talking to you.

Jade Odgers  
Coordinator



### 11th National Rural Health Conference Proceedings Now Online

The full proceedings of the 11th National Rural Health Conference are now available online at: <http://11nrhc.ruralhealth.org.au/>. Jade Odgers, Coordinator of the Grampians Regional Palliative Care Team presented our regional work on the implementation of Nurse Practitioners at this conference.

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