
Preface

The idea for this book surfaced with the wail of a loon. She was swimming without a splash across a lake that mirrored the evergreens bordering its shores. Summer is a matter of weeks rather than months in Canada—tradition has it that we, like birds, migrate to the countryside where moose, grizzlies, herons, and if we are lucky, loons are found. While their cries evoke a sense of loneliness, loons are loyal mates, protective of their chicks and thrive in a close-knit family.

The summer is a time when I allow my mind, heart and spirit to wander in the woods and across the waters. An observer may presume that I am doing nothing, but truth be told, I am being more than doing. Being human, that is. My meditation practice opens me to the elements—they are my teachers.

While listening to the loons, I wondered how I could gather other voices—those of clinicians who exemplify whole person care. I have been teaching mindful medical practice, along with my colleague Dr. Tom Hutchinson—the director of McGill Programs for Whole Person Care—for 8 years in various formats (8-week programs, half-day and full-day workshops and weekend retreats). We published numerous papers (1–13) on the topic and presented our work at conferences—the conventional way of communicating the value of mindful medical practice from our point of view. It occurred to me, that the 200 plus articulate and compassionate physicians and allied health care professionals we have encountered over the years have as much to say about being present, bearing witness to pain and suffering and creating a space for healing in their patients and themselves as we do. I realized that they often work in silos and seem lonely, like the loons whose haunting cries permeate the lake I sat next to. Yet, I was aware that there are many mindful practitioners who support one another. Similar to loons, they thrive in groups. I thought by compiling their narratives they and you (the reader) would know that we form a community. Shortly thereafter, I invited physicians and other clinicians working in various settings with different specialties to showcase how and why mindfulness matters.

Patients' tales of illness and how it has altered their lives has become a genre in and of itself. Less common are chronicles that emerge from the consciousness of their clinicians who treat them. The narratives herein provide a window into their experiences¹. The book is intended for medical students and residents, physicians and other clinicians who aspire to bring mindfulness into their lives and work. It may also be of interest to patients, their families and the general public given the broad interest in the relationship between mindfulness and wellbeing. We are fortunate that the co-authors of this book were generous enough to share their insights with us. Their narratives are inspiring and remind us that “the tender gravity of kindness” (14) may guide our interventions.

Patricia Lynn Dobkin PhD

¹ In all cases we have changed names and details to protect patient identities unless patients provided consent to have their stories told.

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