



## New Hope For Burnout Syndrome in the ICU

By Andy Nellis

Nurse burnout is an unfortunately common occurrence in American intensive care units (ICU's). It's a phenomenon that forces many highly-trained caregivers to leave the field only a few years after entering, and it's why researchers at the University of Colorado's PSCCM division have developed a new mindfulness program to boost resiliency in ICU nurses.

The phenomenon is called Burnout Syndrome, or BOS, and it affects around 80 percent of ICU nurses, according to an article published in the journal *Depression and Anxiety*.

"Imagine a 29-year-old otherwise healthy person," Dr. Moss explains, "who is admitted to the hospital because of the flu, develops Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) and dies. That's not easy to deal with... It's sad, it's tragic." And yet it's something nurses have to deal with on a regular basis, and listening to Dr. Moss, it becomes apparent how difficult it is to handle that ongoing human trauma.

Dr. Moss and his team of researcher aim to help ICU nurses combat burnout syndrome through a therapeutic intervention called Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). The intervention is based on the work of the University of Toronto's Dr. Zindel Segal and uses a combination of mindfulness practices and meditation to provide ICU nurses with constructive methods for coping with the strain of working in the ICU. Participation involves four sessions where the nurses are led through mindfulness exercises designed to refocus their awareness on the present and to navigate their way through negative, automatic thoughts.

A variant of the intervention has been used in the past to treat depression, anxiety, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Most ICU nurses are never trained to deal with the emotional fallout of their work, and even if they are, the recurring stress associated with it requires a certain level of resiliency, which some may lack. However, resiliency can be taught, and Dr. Moss hopes to address this with the MBCT intervention.

"We need to provide the proper support and training so that critical care healthcare professionals can continue to enjoy their jobs and deliver the best care to their patients."

While the study is still in its pilot phase, it is already garnering attention. This past July, Dr. Moss lectured on the subject to the National Academy of Medicine's Action Collaborative on Clinician Well-Being and Resilience. The first cohort of MBCT sessions for the study began this summer (2017), and if the intervention proves effective, the team aims to launch a nation-wide program, providing new hope to the future of the ICU, and the nurses who work there.