

BY VICTORIA WILSON

# IF YOUR WAY DOES NOT WORK, ISN'T IT TIME TO CONSIDER A NEW STRATEGY?



In a report published in December 2023 which focused on the potential of personalised neurofeedback for meditation, the authors explained that the ability to foster mindfulness had been empirically reported to decrease mood disorders, anxiety, anger, depression and fatigue. They also referenced some studies suggesting that mindful meditation could enhance attention and cognitive performance, as well as help with emotional regulation.<sup>1</sup>

Let's stop for a moment though. Meditation is increasingly touted as a solution for many social and structural stressors, but how realistic is its practise for dental professionals whose diaries are always full and who have not got time to breathe, either in the workplace or at home? Besides, how can meditation be considered an option if individuals' personalities do not inherently easily lend themselves to the idea of slowing down and developing meditation?

Busy dental professionals often express a common challenge: the perception that meditation is not for them because they struggle to sit still and quieten their racing minds. With constant thoughts of impending deadlines and endless to-do lists, the effort to simply 'do nothing' can feel more stressful than relaxing. Meditation might seem almost antithetical to being a suitable solution for individuals used to handling daily complex multitasking and always undertaking responsibilities at speed.

No wonder that retreating to a peaceful setting to meditate might feel completely counterproductive and even make individuals worry about disengaging from tangible problems instead of tackling them!

## Work-life balance

I have recently conducted wellbeing roundtables with Claire Frisby and our findings confirmed that promoting well-being among dental professionals should be at the core of every dental practice.

Dental professionals have reported: feeling pressurised to constantly deliver; having concerns about professional regulation; fear of litigation from patients; and working in a high-stress environment with relentless challenges along the way.<sup>2,3</sup> This often results in individuals feeling overwhelmed, reaching a state of toxic resilience. We work in such a rewarding profession and it feels so unfair and tragic that some individuals gradually lose that perspective. It does not have to be that way!

Regularly checking in with colleagues must become a daily routine within these settings.<sup>4</sup> It is essential to recognise that caring for individual well-being is a shared responsibility among all dental professionals, and access to support resources should be clearly signposted. Furthermore, establishing systemic approaches within dental settings to promote well-being is vital and represents a significant opportunity for future growth and enhancement.

Regardless of whether meditation is on anyone's agenda, I

would really like to encourage my peers to stop and reflect for as little as two minutes, about whether their current life prioritises their physical and mental health and aligns with their vision 10 years ahead, if asked to look into the future. What do you envision for yourself? Does your current work-life balance support this ideal for the future? If the answer is yes, that's wonderful! However, if the answer is no, this presents an opportunity to pause and reflect on the small, cost-effective adjustments that can be made now to realistically achieve a future vision and aspiration.

A favourite quote from *Sadhguru*, which I often share with my colleagues is: "Pain is a part of being human. Suffering is optional."<sup>5</sup>

Professional reflection among dental professionals is an ongoing process. However, incorporating additional reflection that prioritises our well-being should also be a daily consideration. This approach aligns with the need for primary prevention in the realm of mental health for dental professionals.<sup>6</sup>

If we are all aspiring to operate consistently at peak performance, experiencing greater well-being and better job satisfaction, surely the idea of putting new strategies in place should start to make sense?

I would like to reassure everyone that cultivating a meditation practice does not need to encroach on the time one does not have. During a class I delivered recently, a participant commented, *'It is when we feel we don't have the time that we must **find the time**, to do something for ourselves.'*

Meditation is one of the most disciplined practices for enhancing focus and minimising distractions. It has been shown to increase the ability to reframe how we interpret stressors and our responses. Meditation is about training your mind to increase your ability to solve insight-related problems, and having a favourable impact on key workplace outcomes, including performance, relationships, and well-being.

From the rapid evidence-based review commissioned by the GDC<sup>7</sup> one thing recently highlighted was that dental professionals would potentially be more receptive to adopt something specifically tailored to their needs. This would mean looking into the challenges they commonly face; like the fear of litigation, the need for perfectionism, time constraints, the constant pressure of high expectations on themselves, phobic patients, writing comprehensive notes, the fear of whistleblowing, the fear of not being competent or confident, to name but a few.

If meditation could be tailored to be more meaningful to the profession, in a configuration that made sense to individuals, amongst a community of like-minded professionals, then I think people would be a lot keener to engage and at least give it a go. I have also observed this over the last four years from delivering mindful movement and meditation classes online on a weekly basis.

Philips has supported me for years as the company recognises the importance of helping practices which place an emphasis on individual and collective growth to ensure they thrive in clinic and maintain high value to patients, whilst making personal happiness a priority.

I am thrilled the company wholeheartedly agreed to work collaboratively with me to raise awareness of my recent wellbeing roundtables, and now with my meditation initiatives tailored specifically to dental professionals to help the profession deal with the challenges of daily life.

With this in mind, we would like dental professionals to take ownership of their well-being, reflect upon what meditation could mean to them, and question how and if this could serve them and address their needs. It is about helping them acknowledge and interpret stressors in their lives and find ways to help them function as optimally as they can. If individuals constantly feel overwhelmed, this naturally dilutes their ability to focus, excel and reach their full potential, so how can they possibly deliver the highest levels of care for their patients?

Primary prevention can prevent the need for full-on interventional support and starts by recognising what our bodies interpret as stress, and how it shows up in our body, and when one is stressed, and learning how one can skilfully manage pressures. Engaging in meditation can take as little time as three minutes a day and can be incorporated into established habits (like time taken to brush one's teeth!).<sup>6</sup>

I would like to highlight that practising meditation should be part of a multi-pronged strategy to help individuals.

A series of complimentary meditation mindfulness videos to prepare for a New Year, New You will soon be available on my Smile Revolution platform. For more information:

**Victoria - [info@smile-revolution.net](mailto:info@smile-revolution.net) [www.smile-revolution.net/yoga](http://www.smile-revolution.net/yoga)**

**Author:** Victoria is a member of the Editorial Board.

**Contact:** [info@smile-revolution.net](mailto:info@smile-revolution.net)

## References

1. Basso J, McHale A, Ende V, Oberlin D, Suzuki WA. Brief, daily meditation enhances attention, memory, mood, and emotional regulation in non-experienced meditators. *Behav Brain Res*. 2019;**356**:208-220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbr.2018.08.023>.
2. Bakar NA, Lim SL, Basri NA, Ludin SM. Mental health and well-being of undergraduate dental students: a systematic review. *Int J Care Scholars*. 2021;**42(2)**:56-70. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijcs.v4i2.190>.
3. Dimatteo MR, Shugars DA, Hays RD. Occupational stress, life stress and mental health among dentists. *J Occupation Organiz Psychol*. 1993;**66(2)**:153-162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.2044-8325.1993.TB00524.X>.
4. Salazar FB, Sipiyaruk K, White S, Gallagher JE. Key determinants of health and wellbeing of dentists within the UK: a rapid review of over two decades of research. *Brit Dent J*. 2019;**27(2)**:127-136. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-019-0485-2>.
5. Whitman SM. Pain and suffering as viewed by the Hindu religion. *J Pain*. 2007;**8(8)**:607-613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JPAIN.2007.02.430>.
6. Gallagher JE, Colonio-Salazar FB, White S. Supporting dentists' health and wellbeing - a qualitative study of coping strategies in 'normal times'. *Brit Dent J*. 2021; **20**:1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-021-3205-7>.
7. Plessas A, Paisi M, Bryce M, Burns L, O'Brien T, Witton R, Hanoch Y. Mental Health and Wellbeing in Dentistry: A Rapid Evidence Assessment. <https://www.gdc-uk.org/itineris/research/detail/report/mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-dentistry-a-rapid-evidence-assessment>