

Mental readiness expert

A military veteran designed mindfulness-based training to assist those in extreme stress environments.

It doesn't take survey results to understand health care workers are in stressful occupations and need ways to relieve stress. Understanding stress and knowing how to get relief is the difficult part. Elizabeth Stanley knows stress. She was on active duty with the U.S. Army, earned a B.A. from Yale, an MBA from MIT, and a Ph.D. in government from Harvard. Stanley experienced chronic stress and traumatic events during childhood and while on active duty; she was later diagnosed with PTSD. For years, Stanley suppressed stress, but its effects manifested as other health problems, in-



Elizabeth Stanley, Ph.D., has taught resilience concepts and skills to thousands in high-stress environments.

cluding temporary blindness. After learning about the science of stress and finding ways to cope, Stanley created Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT) to improve performance and enhance resilience for people who work in an extreme stress environment. Stanley is associate professor of security studies at Georgetown University and will be a keynote speaker at the Quality and Safety in Children's Health Conference March 9 to 11 in Kansas City.

Why is it important to address stress? High-stress professionals can have cultural habits that exacerbate stress and trauma. People get used to powering through—compartmentalizing emotions so they can function. My system went for one of the weakest links, my optic nerve, and I developed vision problems so severe I couldn't read or drive. That was my frying pan upside the head that it was time to learn a new way of being.

Why are health care workers good candidates for mindfulness-based training? Someone may function well for years, but without recovery they're undermining resilience. High achievers tend to use the powering through strategy. That can be good in the immediate term, but when it becomes a constant coping mechanism, it can override our system's ability to recover and lead to longer term challenges for health and well-being.

What are some common stress contributors? Chronic sleep deprivation among health care providers has been linked with medical errors. It also negatively affects executive functioning and ability to regulate emotions. Providers may rely on caffeine, tobacco or unhealthy food choices to keep going—but these can lead to chronic inflammation, a root cause of many physical and neurodegenerative diseases.

How does the work environment affect stress? There's a range of research about open workspaces and the connection to absenteeism and lower job satisfaction. Autonomy also comes into play. Look at the electronic health record; if providers feel they have no choice about using it, they may feel helpless, powerless and lacking control. The sense of lack of control moves stress into the realm of traumatic stress.
—Christine Bush

SAVE THE DATE

NEW IDEAS

Exchange strategies and solutions to advance clinical effectiveness and improve patient safety at the 2020 Quality and Safety in Children's Health Conference. Join pediatric-focused peers in Kansas City, March 9 to 11. Education sessions will provide tested methods to engage patients and families in care, build capacity within your organization to continuously improve the delivery of care, and improve health care outcomes across the continuum.

IN HER OWN WORDS

Caroline DeLongchamps understands the patient and family experience because her son's life hung in the balance in a pediatric ICU. At the Quality and Safety in Children's Health Conference, DeLongchamps will describe her family's experience and explain her vision for any organization to honor and respect the patient and family partnership.

Members: Visit childrenshospitals.org/quality20 and register by Feb. 14 to receive early bird pricing.



For resources on building your resilience and reducing burnout among staff, visit childrenshospitals.org/resiliency.