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McGill Programs in Whole Person Care

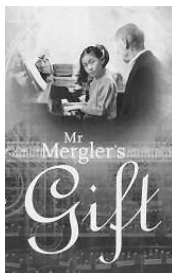
Department of Oncology

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Films that Transform: In Dialogue with Others on the Journey

"We must be willing to get rid of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting"

The goal of the Programs in Whole Person Care (WPC) is to create a focus for healing and whole person care at McGill. Part of our mandate is to contribute to education related to healing within the University, the wider academic community, and the general public. To that end we have planned a monthly film series which will provide a forum for the general public to meet with the McGill medical community to view and discuss films that will encourage viewers to explore the mean-



Mr. Mergler's Gift, Directed by Beverly Shaffer, is one of the opening films for the WPC film series

ing of healing and "wellness" in daily life.

Electronic media are a powerful way to tap the subconscious. Perhaps it is this power that makes us fear media such as television and film for their destructive potential. Their capacity to promote positive transformation and healing is the other side of the same coin. With the WPC film series, we plan to harness the power of film by matching the showing of films with an introduction and discussion by a panel combining medical and media expertise in dialogue with members of the general public.

The goal of the project is to provide an understanding of healing in a modern biomedical context, and to promote

recognition of healing as an integral component of medical science and practice.

Each session will feature a special guest, such as Terry Mosher (October), Thomas Moore (April) and Michael Kearney (May), who will lead the discussion following the film.

The series will run from September 2005 to June 2006. Films will be screened at 7 pm in Moyse Hall, in the Arts Building.

Tickets will cost \$10 each (\$5 for students & seniors. A season pass is available for \$85).

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Film Series Schedule

September 13	<i>Mr. Mergler's Gift & Appointment with the Wise Old Dog</i>
October 4	<i>Ryan & In the Gutter and Other Good Places</i>
November 29	<i>What the Bleep Do we Know?</i>
December 6	<i>Genghis Blues</i>
January 10	<i>The Man Who Learned to Fall</i>
February 14	<i>The Boys of Buchenwald</i>
March 14	<i>Zero Degrees of Separation</i>
April 11	<i>Andy Goldsworthy: Rivers & Tides/Working with Time</i>
May 2	<i>Ram Dass: Fierce Grace</i>
June 6	<i>How's Your News?</i>



Book Review: Coming to Our Senses

Tom Hutchinson, MB, FRCS(C)

Jon Kabat-Zinn's latest book, "Coming to our senses: healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness" is a thorough exploration of mindfulness, how it can be cultivated, and the implications of such a development for healing ourselves and the world, including the implications for medicine. According to Kabat-Zinn "Mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, non-judgemental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, as openheartedly as possible".

Cultivating mindfulness is on the face of it a simple business – meditate in one of the many ways outlined by Kabat-Zinn in his book or in other books on meditation. But for that to work you first of all have to understand what meditation is really about. I used to think it was a calming kind of exercise where you repeated a word or paid attention to your breathing and fell into a pleasant trance-like state. I used to think the same about golf. In fact meditation is like a kind of mental golf in which the aim is moment to moment attention to the process at hand and the continual need to let go of attachment to the past moment and the next moment. Like playing golf without getting preoccupied with the previous shot or the next shot, it is easier said than done. But if we care enough and practice diligently we learn to loosen our attachment to our ordinary distractions and to fall "awake" to ourselves.

But what precisely does this have to do with the practice of medicine? Around 1910 Sir William Osler was on his way to present for degrees at Oxford dressed in the full regalia of the Regius Professor of Medicine. He was asked to see a young boy who was dying of whooping cough¹:

"The Regius, (...) hard pressed for time, arrived already wearing his doctor's robes (gowns). To a small child this was the advent of a doctor, if doctor it in fact was, from quite a different planet. It was more probably Father Christmas.

After a very brief examination this unusual visitor sat down, peeled a

peach, sugared it and cut it in pieces. He then presented it bit by bit with a fork to the entranced patient, telling him to eat it up, and that he would not be sick but would find it did him good as it was a most special fruit. Such proved to be the case. As he hurried off Osler, most uncharacteristically, patted (the boy's) father on the back and said with deep concern 'I'm sorry Ernest but I don't think I shall see the boy again, there's very little chance when they're as bad as that.' Happily events turned out otherwise, and for the next forty days this constantly busy man came to see the child, and for each of these forty days he put on his doctor's robes in the hall before going in to the sick room."

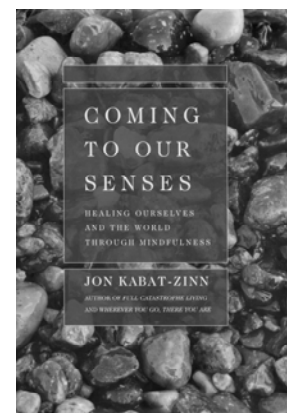
One cannot imagine any formula or guideline for this kind of clinical encounter but clearly Osler was fully present and awake as a committed, caring and creative human being (mindful) in this healing encounter with his young patient.

I believe that Osler's kind of expansion of awareness is essential if physicians are to fulfill their combined roles of curing and healing described by Eric Cassell² and further developed by Michael Kearney³. Curing is an eradication or a change in the disease state induced primarily by the physician's exertions. Healing is a response shift in the person healed towards a sense of integrity and wholeness. The energy for healing comes from the patient although the process may be facilitated by a deep and supportive relationship with a health care worker. Many physicians are beginning to rediscover healing as an important part of what society wants from them. The challenge is that the qualities required for curing and healing are different and even contradictory. For instance in the curing mode the physician focuses on what the patient shares in common with other patients with the same disease while in the healing mode he/she pays attention to the unique characteristics and context of the patient before him. But can a normal person pay attention in two

contradictory ways at the same time? Are we asking too much of physicians and other health care workers?

I suspect that we are not asking enough. I believe that most health care workers are capable of being fully present to their patients as professionals and as whole human beings. For myself I realize in retrospect that is why I got into medicine in the first place. And, surprisingly, living in accordance with our real and often challenging values may be less stressful than the alternative⁴. I agree with Kabat-Zinn that techniques for cultivating mindfulness are central to this deeper interpretation of the health care mandate. But there is probably more to it than simply learning a technique. Buddha, the originator of mindfulness, gave up all of his material possessions and took to the road with his begging bowl. Our shaman precursors went through a near death experience or psychotic episode before they were qualified for practice. What is the equivalent for 21st century physicians? Perhaps it is a question that each physician needs to ask him/herself: What do you need to give up, or what commitment do you need to make to bring the full force of your attention to the practice of medicine?

1. Bliss M. William Osler: a life in medicine. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 374.
2. Cassell E. The healer's art. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1976.
3. Kearney M. A place of healing. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
4. Massimini F, Delle Fave A. Individual development in a bio-cultural perspective. Am Psychol. 2000; 55:24-33.



Coming to Our Senses. Jon Kabat-Zinn
H.B. Fenn & Company, 2005.

McGill Seminars on Healing

In January 2005, Dr. Tom Hutchinson initiated the McGill Seminars on Healing. A total of six seminars took place in the Gerald Bronfman Seminar room, on topics such as “Aequanimitas for the 21st Century” (Dr. Hutchinson) and “Dying Well: Human Development Through the End of Life” (Dr. Ira Byock). Seminars were attended by colleagues from the Faculty of Medicine, as well as Nursing, Pastoral Care and a variety of other disciplines.

A new series is scheduled for September – December 2005, and will feature lectures from McGill and MUHC col-

leagues, as well as visiting lecturers.

Seminars take place in the basement seminar room of the Gerald Bronfman Centre for Clinical Research in Oncology. 546 Pine Avenue West.

Refreshments are served at each session. Please inform us if you plan to attend.

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Seminar Schedule

All seminars take place from 12:30–2 pm

September 30, 2005	Ellen Aitkin McGill University Faculty of Religious Studies <i>Words and the Body: Ancient Spiritual Perspectives on Suffering and Healing</i>
October 28, 2005	Saki Santorelli University of Massachusetts, Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society <i>Healing and Medicine</i>
November 25, 2005	Jean Paul Collet McGill University, Faculty of Medicine <i>What is at stake with “Integrative Medicine”?</i>
December 9, 2005	Tom Hutchinson & Dawn Allen McGill Programs in Whole Person Care <i>Healing, Transformation and Identity</i>

Curious, odd compounds are these fellow-creatures, ... full of fads and eccentricities, of whims and fancies; but the more closely we study their little foibles of one sort and another in the inner life which we see, the more surely is the conviction borne in upon us of the likeness of their weaknesses to our own

Osler W. Valedictory Address, Aequanimitas, University of Pennsylvania, May 1, 1889.

Recent books, articles of interest

Books:

Learning to Fall. Philip Simmons. Bantam 2002.

The Renewal of Generosity: Illness, Medicine and How to Live. Arthur W. Frank. University of Chicago Press. 2004.

Coming to Our Senses. Jon Kabat-Zinn. H.B. Fenn & Co, 2005.

Articles

Egnew TR. The meaning of healing: transcending suffering. *Annals of Family Medicine*, 2005; 3:3 255-262.

Whole Person Care Publications

Hutchinson TA. Transitions in the lives of patients with End Stage Renal Disease: a cause of suffering and an opportunity of healing. *Palliative Medicine* 2005; 19:270-277.



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programmes de
soins
holistes
de McGill

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Director

Tom A. Hutchinson, MB, FRCP(C)

Founding Director

Balfour M. Mount, MD, FRCP(S)

Faculty

Patricia Dobkin, PhD

Steve Jordan, PhD

Antonia Arnaert, PhD

Helen MacNamara, MD (Faculty Scholar)

Dawn Allen, PhD (Research Fellow)

Administrative Staff:

Eileen Lavery; Nancy Gair; Megan Wainwright

Supported by the Donner Canadian Foundation and the Max Bell Foundation.

McGill Programs in Whole Person Care

Traditionally, the existential and spiritual aspects of illness and their relationship to health care outcomes have received limited attention within the educational and research environment of North America. In recognition of this fact, the McGill Programs in Whole Persons Care were instituted in February 1999 on the initiative of Dean Abraham Fuks and Dr. Balfour Mount. The initial proposal to develop and to implement the programs established the need for further research studies and educational programs that address the subjective experience of illness so as to include the spiritual and/or existential components of personhood, as well as the physical and emotional elements that are currently the focus of attention in the medical profession.

The McGill programs are based on the premise that in situations in which treatment is unable to change the dis-

ease outcome, it may be possible to create a space in which healing can occur. Lessons about quality of life and individuation, learned in the arena of advanced illness, also have relevance earlier in the disease trajectory and for those who are physically well. While the existential/spiritual domain is known to be an important determinant of quality of life, there has been little emphasis on integration of these issues in health care. The Programs therefore seek to integrate the physical aspects of personhood along with the psychosocial and existential/spiritual ones, and to better understand how to respond to suffering experienced by the whole person.

In September 2004 Dr. Tom Hutchinson assumed the position of Director of the Programs. He has spent this past sabbatical year establishing the future activities for the programs. Dr. Hutchinson comes to the Programs with a background in nephrology, clinical epi-

demology, palliative medicine and family therapy. He is a palliative care physician at the MGH. Dr Balfour Mount continues to be closely involved with the Programs.

In January 2005 the McGill Programs in Whole Person Care changed premises, when Dr. Gerald Batist approved the use of the third floor of the Gerald Bronfman Building for the exclusive use of the programs. The space houses the offices of Dr. Hutchinson, Dr. Mount and Dr. Dobkin, and incorporates space for a faculty scholar (Helen MacNamara) and research fellow (Dawn Allen) and administrative staff.

The Program space will also be used for meditation groups for students, among other activities. Research activities will include completion of a qualitative study on Quality of Life among Patients with End Stage Renal Disease (Hutchinson, Jordan & Arnaert). The Programs will also be hosting a monthly seminar series as well as a film series.