

Mantram Repetition May Be Effective Stress-Reliever for Veterans and VA Hospital Staff

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“Mantram Repetition for Stress Management in Veterans and Employees: A Critical Incident Study” by Jill Bormann, PhD, RN; Doug Oman, PhD; Jeanne Kemppainen, PhD, RN; Sheryl Becker, MS, RN; Madeline Gershwin, MA, RN, and Ann Kelly, MS, RN.

AUTHOR/FUNDING INFORMATION:

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BACKGROUND:

People who experience high levels of perceived stress may suffer from stress-related illnesses such as hypertension, heart disease, depression and other mental disorders. Stress-related symptoms such as anxiety, obsessive thoughts, and insomnia are often treated with medication, psychotherapy, and/or cognitive behavioral stress management techniques. Complimentary approaches to stress management (i.e., meditation) may offer effective, lower-cost alternatives with fewer side effects. This study assessed a specific mantram repetition program authored by Easwaran, a spiritual teacher of meditation, in a VA setting. The mantram repetition technique involves silently repeating a specific word or phrase—often with spiritual meaning—continually throughout the day, making it easily integrated into one’s life for reducing stress and inducing relaxation. Investigators assessed 30 veterans and 36 VA hospital employees who attended a 5-week program designed to teach a “mind-body-spiritual” technique of silently repeating a mantram to manage stress by redirecting and training attention. Veterans and VA hospital staff, who participated in the program between 4/01 and 3/02, were interviewed by telephone 3-6 months after the program to assess stressful incidents (i.e., stress, insomnia, unwanted thoughts) in which the mantram program proved helpful or not.

FINDINGS:

- Fifty-five participants (83.3%), both veterans and VA staff, practiced the mantram technique and reported 147 stressful incidents in which it was helpful.
- The most frequently reported uses of the mantram were for managing: emotions other than stress (i.e., impatience, anger, frustration – 51%), stress (23.8%), insomnia (12.9%), and unwanted thoughts (12.3%).
- Of the veterans who participated, nearly all were male and seven had been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder, while six suffered from PTSD. Of the hospital staff, the majority was female, and only two had a psychiatric diagnosis.

LIMITATIONS:

- A convenience sample was used within a governmental healthcare setting in a single location.