

Stress Management for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) Patients Based on The Buddha's Teaching of Mindfulness



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ABSTRACT

This research article, aims to: 1) examine the state of SLE sickness and stress problems in terms of medical science, 2) study the Buddha's teaching of mindfulness in Theravāda Buddhism, and 3) propose the stress management for the SLE patient's mindset adjustment based on the Buddha's teaching of mindfulness; it is qualitative research, it draws on documents, in including The Tipiṭaka, commentaries and sub-commentaries of *Pāli* Text Society's English translation series; primary source texts from medical sciences, and Buddhist textbooks, research works and journals, together with in-depth interviews conducted with three groups of key informants total of 12 people: Buddhist scholars/experts, SLE doctors/ Nurses and SLE patients, and a focus group discussion among Buddhist scholars, Vipassana master, meditation teacher, psychologist and Buddhist psychology scholars.

My research findings are as follows:

1) SLE (auto-immune disease) is a chronic autoimmune disease affecting multiple organ systems. When the disease is active, immune responses can cause

inflammation in cells which can affect one or many tissues of the human body. Stress is one of the crucial factors for SLE activation; its medical or biological context is of physical and mental or emotional factors that cause bodily and mental tension

2) The Buddha's teaching of mindfulness, the four foundations of mindfulness help mental development, physical improvement and stress reduction.

3) The Buddhist approach to mindfulness and mindfulness practice are proposed as mindful stress management techniques for SLE patients' mindset adjustment for application in their daily lives. The Buddha's teaching of mindfulness plays the most important role for this "stress management"; the key components of it called "Mindful techniques": Moment in Moment Observation (M), Intelligence (I), Non-Judgement (N), Detachment (D), Forgiveness (F), Understanding Oneself (U), and Live with Love (L), aim to help patients adjust mindset and manage stress:

Keywords: Stress Management, SLE Patients, Buddha's Teaching of Mindfulness.

Introduction

The way for of life has changed dramatically: work and life are no longer well balanced, which is contributing to increased stress levels. Stress is our body responds to pressures from a situation or life event. Apparently, stress is one of the main factors that affect to SLE (Systemic Lupus Erythematosus) SLE is a disease in which the immune system becomes overactive and starts making antibodies against its own cells. When the disease is active, immune responses can cause inflammation in cells. SLE can be treated by medication and non-medication measures by minimizing stress. Scholars claim that mindfulness practice is the way to create a peace of mind and can reduce stress level. It was found that *Satipaṭṭhāna* can reduce stress levels, moreover, “mindfulness-based stress reduction: MBSR) by Jon Kabat-Zinn and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) had been suggested to help to reduce and manage the stress for individual and had been introduced in Western clinical therapy by apply mindfulness as the way of reducing a patient’s stress level. Though the cure for SLE mostly originates from the Western world under western medication, knowledge from the East, such as Buddhism, has not been fully utilized. This research aims to examine the Buddha’s teachings from Tipiṭaka in the area of mindfulness in order to find stress management ways, adjust mindset and to help SLE patients cope with their health issues more effectively. The teaching and practice of mindfulness are important as mental discipline for settle mindfulness and proper mental process for individual. Mindfulness is important element as it will helping individual to develop mental process, cultivating the positive though and bring about mindset adjustment to SLE patients.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the state of SLE sickness and stress problems in terms of medical science.
2. To study the Buddha’s teaching of mindfulness in Theravāda Buddhism.
3. To propose the stress management for the SLE patient’s mindset adjustment based on the Buddha’s teaching of mindfulness.

Research Methodology

It is qualitative research with used methods of studying documents and the research process in each step is as following:

1) Studies from books, textbooks, Buddhist scripture, related document and researches to systematize the knowledge and bringing study result related to the Buddha's teaching of mindfulness to create research tools.

2) An in-depth interview 12 interviewees with three groups of key informants totaling 12 people of Buddhist scholars/expert, SLE doctors/nurse and SLE patients.

3) A focus group discussion with technical specialists; Buddhist scholars, Vipassana master, meditation teacher, psychologist and Buddhist psychology scholar who had given valuable of knowledge based on their field experiences and noticeable stress management model had been drawn from this useful discussion. 4) Stress management or SLE patients' mindset adjustment based on the Buddha's teaching of mindfulness had integrated and all consensus certified on the body of knowledge. Finally, proposing Stress management: Mindful model as the body of knowledge from this research.

Content

State of SLE sickness in medical science:

In Thailand Systemic Lupus Erythematosus: SLE or Lupus syndrome has become well-known in Thai society because of the death of famous Thai Singer namely "Phumpuang Duangchan"; after her death, the news had announced by Thai media stated in the head news that the singer was death and the cause of the death was caused by SLE syndrome in 1992. After that SLE is more recognized and known as "Rok-PhumPaung" in Thai society. The other name in technical term is auto-immune disease. Unfortunately, it was not well declared for the statistic of SLE patients in Thailand; it was unknown for its total number because of it was diversify disease that effecting multiple organ systems, so it was indeed difficult to put it into record. From the data, SLE doctors suggested that the incident for small case of SLE will occur for 1/100 but for the slightly defect is not the patients' real intention to visit doctors while 1/1000 that needs to consult with doctor due to severe auto immune alert

SLE is a disease that relates with immune system. Normally the immune system functions to protect the body against foreign invaders i.e. abnormal molecules, bacteria, viruses, parasites, foreign tissues including transfused blood cells, organ transplants and deranged cells; for example, cancer cells. Immune system functions with antibodies in order to protect human being from foreign invaders. Definitely the function of this system is the ability to differentiate between foreign material (non-self) and the body's own tissue (self) in SLE that recognition system is somehow flawed, and the body's immune system generates antibodies and cells hostile to its own tissue. The Pharmacy Council stated that emotion, stress and sickness are the factors that effect to SLE patients. Stress will decrease internal chemical that called corticotropin releasing hormone drugs that will effective auto-immune activation

There are two ways of treatments as followed:

Firstly, medication: by western medication is depending on the severity of symptoms. Doctor may suggest medication for patient and patients may need to try various treatments before finding the one that is both effective in treating the symptoms. However, by taking medication patient may facing with the side-effects. Symptom control is the goal for non-organ-threatening lupus. Secondly, non- medication measures: plan restful periods during the day, minimizing stress by considering lifestyle modification that makes living with lupus more manageable and keeping the disease under control, regular gentle exercise also helps improve fatigue, reduce stress and avoid provoking factors.

Stress Problems in Medical Science:

Stress is derived from the Latin *stringere*, which means “to pull tight” or “to tighten”. The term stress can be translated as “pressure” or “tension”; in everyday language we use it as an umbrella term denoting all kinds of tension. Frits had given definition “stress is a situation where there is an imbalance between the demands made on us, and the tools we have at our disposal to meet these demands. The causes of stress can put it into 3 factors; Biological factors (autonomic nervous system, bio-chemical nervous, genetic background, personality), Phycological factors (pressure, frustration, conflict, attitudes and beliefs) and social factors (life event, hassles, social class). One of the most dangers of stress is cause illness especially sympathetic nervous system that effected by stress will causing various types of illness.

Mindfulness Practice for preventing stress:

Mindfulness practice has been shown to have a calming effect on the nervous system, helping to switch off the stress response and bring us back into balance. It also trains us to become more aware of stress signals in the body, giving us the chance to respond more effectively. Mindfulness is not a cure for illness, but it's been shown to improve the body's ability to cope with a variety of physical conditions. Stress can weaken the response of the immune system, while evidence suggests that mindfulness can strengthen it. Mindfulness can help us cope better with stress, depression, illness and pain.

Mindfulness had been introduced widely to the western medical field since 1970s. Mindfulness is not a cure for illness, but it's been shown to improve physical ability to cope with variety conditions. There is evidence suggests that mindfulness can strengthen immune system. Mindfulness help us to cope with stress better. Hence, beside the medical treatment doctors apply mindfulness for helping patient as mental treatment. Mindfulness practice can be helpful to improve the psychosocial well-being, physical well-being and spiritual well-being for patient and health professionals. Mental Health Foundation in UK suggested tools for preventing stress as followed; try to sort the possible reason for stress and take control, review life style not taking too much activity that giving pressure , build relationship with friend and family and also try to find volunteer activity, eating healthily, avoid smoking drinking alcohol and caffeine because it can increase feelings of anxiety, physical exercise, take time to relax (work and life in balance), practice mindfulness meditation, get enough sleep and keep things in positive way. Furthermore, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Transcendental Meditation (TM), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) are the names of western instruments that had been used and apply for preventing stress.

Mindfulness as Buddhist techniques for preventing stress:

It is obvious that Buddhist Mindfulness is the Buddha's teaching that well-known and spread from the East to the West as it is very useful for the practitioner. The Buddha stated that mental is the key and human's mind is taking control human physical thus Sati or Mindfulness is playing an important role as mental development tool and help practitioner gaining a peace of mind and lead to attending an enlightenment. Buddhist Masters name as PhraAjarn Suchart Abhijato, PhraAjarn Paisan Visaso, PhraAjarn Pramote Pamojjo etc. claimed that cultivating mindfulness will help people to get out of the suffering, get out of all problem and get out of stress. Mindfulness is the basis human being ability that can be

described the meaning as the mind is fully attending to what is happening and to be fully at present and be aware on what is going on at present.

Cultivating mindfulness is the Buddha's teaching that giving benefits such as healthy with power, calm or peaceful, clear vision, gentle, no stress, no anxiety and no panic. The purpose of practice is preparing mind to gain wisdom. The outstanding benefit is for mental development or having "mental anti-body" that support a good heal and prevent illness as mind is playing the important role for physical health. Moreover, it useful for mental and personal development and useful for daily such as relaxation, stress reduction, anti-worried, improve health condition as it is mental-immune that able to cure or control sickness. Scholars claimed that mindfulness practice keep stress free and helping immunity working in function. It is obvious to be used as a tool for helping stress-related disorder because it is one of natural antidepressants.

Mindfulness is the first ingredient in the Buddha's recipe for awakening. It is the way to seeing how things are, directly, immediately seeing for oneself that which is present and true, taking full attention to each moment. Mindfulness is considered insight meditation since it brings full attention to the body and mind in the present moment without trying to alter our manipulation of the experience. Whatever is occurring in the body or mind, the task is simply to observe the experience its ever changing nature. Practicing mindfulness will help to discover the cause of your own suffering and find the pathway to greater freedom. These insights deepen your understanding of what fuels your stress and suffering and lead to greater balance and peace.

Mindfulness through the tools of *Ānāpānasati* and *Satipaṭṭhāna* has become one of the most useful practices; it is expanding to all around the world. There are world famous mindfulness masters who are taking the Buddha's teaching of mindfulness to teach mindfulness for disciples and people as the tool for mental development that will bring clarity and awareness to their internal and insight experiences. In fact, mindfulness is indeed mental medicine which can heal and help relax mentality which will yield physical healing as well.

It is obvious that Western way for stress management is by using medical treatment and mindfulness practice as the way for stress reduction, Buddhist way for stress management is by applying mindfulness as self-relaxation, mindful breathing is working in term of eastern drug (mental drug) as the way of mental healing. To know we are breathing is to know we are alive, so it is not surprising that mindfulness of breath has been practiced for millennia. Furthermore, the four foundations of mindfulness (body observation, sensation

observation, mind observation and dhamma observation) is the most useful practice as the tool for mental development and stress management.

Research result

Regarding to the knowledge from the mentioned researches and useful information from the in-depth interview with 3 groups of key informants, the researcher has analyzed, synthesized, interpreted and integrated all bodies of knowledge as an integrated stress management for SLE patients' mindset adjustment based on mindfulness that is "Stress Management: Mindful Techniques" Moreover, the Stress Management: Mindful Techniques has been developed from the focus group discussion. The Buddha's teaching of mindfulness is the most important role for this stress management: mindful techniques.

Stress management: Mindful techniques;

Stress management will start with the most important technique that is mindfulness (core concept). Beginning with the core concept of Mindfulness: the stress management starts by using mindfulness to observe mind and matter that occur at present, observing four elements; body observation, sensation observation, mind observation and Dhamma observation in daily life. Every single day SLE patients should try to observe four elements as following:

Body observation means to notice the body and physical behavior ("contemplation of the body") while standing, walking, sitting or lying down.

Sensation observation ("nature of feeling") means to notice various sensations of pleasure and pain, how it feels, or neutral feeling.

Mind observation: state of mind, nature of mind e.g. mind is lustful or free from lust, angry or free from anger, deluded or free from delusion, agitated or concentrated, liberated or fettered, mind got stuck with wondering, anxiety, fear etc.

Dhamma observation: contemplation of mind objects, thoughts and reflection. See Dhamma that occur, see things under the law of nature, seething and understand that nothing last long. It is emptiness.

However, the four foundations of mindfulness in perception for SLE patients to apply as stress management is not the same as the perception in Buddhist practice that is for attending nirvana but aiming for patients' body and mind observation as tool to

manage their stress that cause auto immune activation. Nevertheless, SLE patients having sensitive physical conditions and SLE is diversified syndrome thus some patients cannot practice meditation accordingly due to their physical limitation and their suffering from auto immune activation. Regards this concern, the mindfulness based for stress management in this research will divided mindfulness practice within two ways of practices: passive mindfulness (formal practices) and active mindfulness (informal practices);

1) **Passive Mindfulness (Formal meditation practices):** passive mindfulness means taking time out each day to intentionally sit, stand, or lie down and focus on the breath, bodily sensations, sounds, other senses, or thoughts and emotions, being mindful in every single of breathing in or breathing out focusing on inhale a long breath and exhale a long breath.

2) **Active Mindfulness (informal practice):** involves bringing mindful awareness to daily activities, such as eating, exercising, chores, yoga, singing, drawing, relating to others, and basically any action, whether at work, at home or anywhere else to find oneself. Mindful throughout the day, patients can bring greater focus and appreciation to whatever situation patients are in. as patients continue to grow in mindfulness, they will see the potentiality for informal practice in any situation. At present, westerners take informal mindfulness practice to apply to their daily lives or clinical therapy. Continuously, carry on to the next part which is the key component of stress management for SLE patients' mindset adjustment called "Mindful techniques"

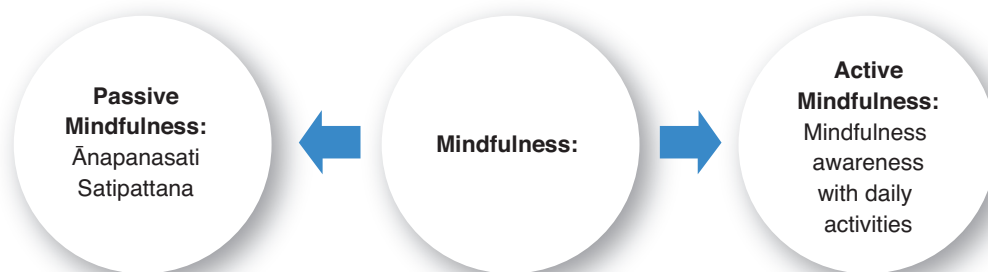


Figure 1: Mindfulness Practices

These Mindful techniques aim to help patient adjusting mindset as human's mind is taking control human physical. SLE patients suffer from long haul sick ness, sometimes it is hard for SLE patients to cope with the syndrome when illness attacks them, but these

mindful techniques help patients control their emotion, manage stress and calm things down effectively. Consequently, Mindful techniques will help improve condition of well-being for patients because these techniques help patients form mindful way of living and reducing stress. Moreover, if patients blend these Mindful techniques in daily life, it will help patients to be at mindful stage rather than stress stage.

In sum, Mindful techniques begin with applying passive mindfulness or active mindfulness in patients' daily lives and then by applying mindful techniques; M: Moment in Moment observation, I: Intelligence, N: Non-Judgement, D: Detachment, F: Forgiveness, U: Understanding oneself and L: Live with Love as stated in the above details. These Mindful techniques are switchable, and they reciprocally support each other. the practice of mindfulness in perception for SLE patients to apply as stress management is not the same as the perception in Buddhist practice that is for attaining *Nibbana* but just aiming for patients' body and mind observation as the tool to manage their stress that cause auto immune activation. Lastly, the stress management: Mindful techniques are useful techniques for SLE patients' mindset adjustment, and these techniques are useful for patients, easy to apply with no expenses, convenient to practice and suitable for SLE patients in order to apply in their daily lives as patient prescription.

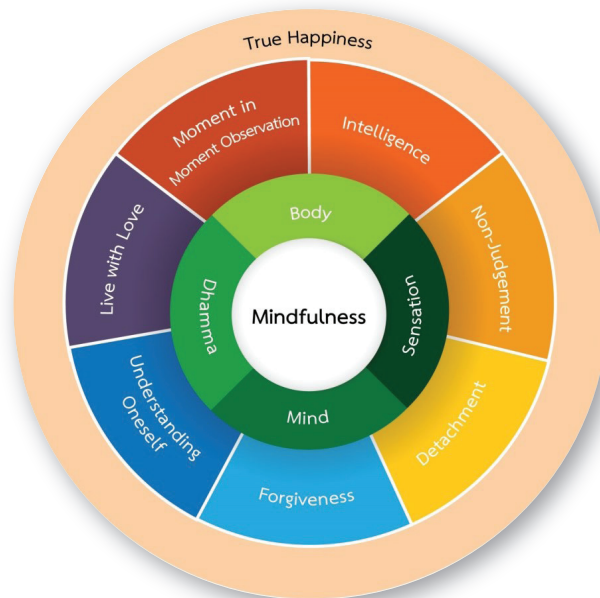


Figure 2: Stress management: Mindful techniques

Conclusion

The gained body of knowledge:

Firstly, it is found that SLE is a chronic autoimmune disease affecting multiple organ systems. When the disease is active, immune responses can cause inflammation in cells which can then affect one or many tissues of the human body. Experts claimed that the causes of SLE are still not so clear, but the crucial factor has been announced that stress is one of the crucial factors; it is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made up on it; and stress in a medical or biological context is a physical, mental or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. One of the most dangers of stress is causing illness especially sympathetic nervous systems will cause various types of illness. From the study, it found the methods to manage stress; by medical treatment and by mindfulness practice as western clinical therapy such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and etc.

Secondly, in studying the Buddha's teaching of mindfulness in Theravāda Buddhism, it is found that mindfulness or Sati is one of the most fundamental practices in Buddhist tradition and the vital importance of the discourse on mindfulness has never been lost from Theravada tradition. Mindfulness or Sati has been recently studied extensively by western researchers and practitioners, but it derived originally from Buddhism that is had been introduced by the Lord Buddha. Buddhism has made mindfulness a core part of teaching which the practical techniques used in current mindfulness training come largely from the Buddhist tradition of meditation. Mindfulness means becoming more aware of what's going on: right here and right now. We can appreciate our lives, instead of rushing through them, always trying to get somewhere else. Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment; it is about teaching oneself to be more aware, present, focused, embodied and accepting. In Buddhist teaching, mindfulness is utilized to develop self-knowledge and wisdom that gradually lead to what is described as enlightenment or the completed freedom from suffering. The four foundations of mindfulness play a vital role in term of Buddhist theory which can divide into 4 main divisions of *Satipaṭṭhāna*: 1) *Kāyānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna*: contemplation of the body or observing the nature of the body, 2) *Vedanānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna*: contemplation of feelings or observing the nature of feeling, 3) *Cittānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna*: contemplation of mind observing the nature of mind, and 4) *Dhammānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna*: contemplation of mind objects or observing the nature of mind objects. In sum *Satipaṭṭhāna* is the way to cultivate mindfulness in our daily lives by using mindfulness for keeping notice in mind

and matter occur at present. If the mind thinks about the past and future, it is not the way of being mindful or lacking Sati (absence of mind). Everybody who pays attention and tries hard to cultivate *Satipaṭṭhāna* may attain *Nibbana*, but this research does not intend the patients to reach this stage. Most of the time when referring to mindfulness practice, there are always coming up with this *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Ānāpāna-sati* meaning mindfulness of breathing that is mindfulness practice by using method of body contemplation that can lead to stability of both posture and mind. Breathing in and breathing out or being mindful in every single of breathing in or breathing out keeps the mind on the track of breathing in and breathing out, focusing on inhale and exhale of a long breath is the mindfulness practice called “*Ānāpāna-sati*.”

Lastly, to propose the stress management for the SLE patient’s mindset adjustment based on the Buddha’s teaching of mindfulness, it is found that many researches claimed that stress affects immune system, stress stimulates mental chemical such as adrenaline or stress hormone that reducing the ability of anti-body. Furthermore, SLE doctors advised that stress is the main factor that affects SLE (Lupus) syndrome thus stress is crucial factor stimulating immune activation. Normally, when people get stress the way to cure is by taking medical treatment. However, recently there have been western clinical treatments that apply mindfulness practices for stress reduction. The western techniques to manage stress are as following: MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, TM: transcendental meditation, CEB: cultivating emotional balance and MBCT: mindfulness-based cognitive therapy while the Buddhist way of practice for stress management is by practicing mindfulness via *Ānāpānasati* and *Satipaṭṭhāna* to observe mind and matter that occur at present. Mindfulness keeps human being with awareness and helps individual to be free from thoughts or free from worries and stress. Mindfulness practice is beneficial to all practitioners that can gain self-awareness, be at present and gain ability to adjust human-being mindset and ability to cope with stress.

The Buddha’s teaching of mindfulness is the most important role for this stress management. The key components of stress management for SLE patients’ mindset adjustment called “mindful techniques”. These mindful techniques aim to help patients adjust their mindset. Mindful techniques begin with applying passive mindfulness or active mindfulness in patients’ daily lives and then by applying mindful techniques: Moment in Moment observation (M), Intelligence (I), Non-Judgement (N), Detachment (D), Forgiveness (F), Understanding oneself (U) and Live with Love (L). These mindful techniques are switchable, and they reciprocally support each other.

To be concluded, the stress management applications of the practice of mindfulness for SLE patients are not at all the same as the desired outcome of Buddhist practice: attaining *Nibbana* but just aiming for patients' body and mind observation as the tool to manage their sole aim is to use patients' body and mind observation as a tool to manage the stress that causes auto immune activation.

Finally, 'the stress management: mindful techniques' are useful techniques for SLE patients' mindset adjustment, and these techniques are useful for patients, easy to apply with cost-free, convenient to practice and suitable for SLE patients to apply to their daily lives as a patient prescription.

Suggestions for Further Research

1) The integration of stress management: mindful techniques for SLE patients' mindset adjustment from this research could be implemented as an alternative for SLE patients in their networks via social media, online education, hospital website or webpage, etc.

2) Suggestion for further actions from this research is to set up a trial group of SLE patients at the first stage in a certain period to implement the proposed integration with participatory observation, recording and evaluation to see the outcome.

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