A mixed-methods systematic review of studies of the effects of mindfulness training on nurses and student nurses published between 1980 and 2014 was carried out. This consisted of a review of controlled and uncontrolled clinical trials and a synthesis of qualitative studies which were then integrated to explore the congruence between themes identified in each. A wide definition of mindfulness was adopted, including meditation, relaxation techniques, and yoga or stress-management programmes incorporating an element of mindfulness, relaxation or meditation. The quality of included studies was assessed using validated tools, and the review process is described in detail.

Findings
Thirty-two studies were identified, including 16 randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and 4 qualitative studies. Only one of the qualitative studies included a specific mindfulness intervention (the others consisted of a mix of practices including meditation, yoga and Tai-Chi), indicating that further work is warranted in this area. RCTs tended to focus on improvements in negative psychological states such as depression and anxiety (significant improvements were identified in both these domains); only five included follow-up data measuring the extent of sustained change. Qualitative data explored the underlying causes of these traits, such as work overload, and also exposed nurse-perceived benefits of mindfulness such as increased calmness and patient-focused care. There was thus a degree of discrepancy between what was being measured and the benefits that were being experienced. Challenges to sustaining mindfulness practice were identified in the qualitative synthesis, such as insufficient time and the difficulty of sustaining practice on one’s own. Ways of mitigating these could be included in future RCT interventions.

Commentary
This review demonstrates how a mixed-methods approach can move beyond presenting a summary of current knowledge to establishing how appropriate, complete and ultimately clinically useful that knowledge might be. Qualitative research can tell us about the nature of a problem (or, in this case, solution), before we start to measure effectiveness. Here, qualitative research is used to critique current and direct further quantitative enquiry—essentially asking whether quantitative researchers have been asking the right questions. Not only do the qualitative findings provide some context to the depression and anxiety measured in the quantitative studies, they also suggest improvements in well-being and patient care that have not yet been measured in quantitative research. Harden further points out that qualitative enquiry can work alongside quantitative research to explore how and why an intervention works—simply being able to state that mindfulness reduces depression and anxiety among nurses tells us nothing about how that is achieved, or whether and how it impacts on patient care. Guillaumie et al suggest that a larger corpus of qualitative work on the impact of mindfulness training would enable theory to be developed to explain its effects and their underlying causes. This work has been started by Hunter who used the limited research available to propose a Mindfulness Cascade, illustrating how increased calmness ultimately leads to improved patient care. Future qualitative research can build on this theory, while quantitative studies can measure the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the mechanisms suggested.

Competing interests None declared.

Provenance and peer review Commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

References
2. Hunter L, Magill-Cuerden J, McCourt C. ‘Oh no, no, no, we haven’t got time to be doing that’: challenges encountered introducing a breast-feeding support intervention on a postnatal ward. Midwifery 2015;31:798–804.
Mindfulness training can reduce depression and anxiety among nurses

Louise Hunter

Evid Based Nurs 2017 20: 57 originally published online February 23, 2017
doi: 10.1136/eb-2016-102592

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://ebn.bmj.com/content/20/2/57

These include:

References
This article cites 4 articles, 0 of which you can access for free at:
http://ebn.bmj.com/content/20/2/57#BIBL

Email alerting service
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Topic Collections
Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections
Editor's choice (92)

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/