Menninger launches weekly blog on PsychologyToday.com

Every day PsychologyToday.com gets 1.5 million visits. Many of those visitors read the blogs. Now there’s a Menninger blog poised to become essential reading by those seeking mental health information.

The first blog post is a collaboration by Dr. Jon Stevens and former Menninger dietitian Kim George. Read it here.

A new Mind Matters blog will be posted weekly on Psychology Today’s website. The blog is under the clinical direction of Dr. Stevens. There will be solo and collaborative posts by our staff on a wide range of newsmaking and popular mental health topics.

Dr. Stevens and staff from Marketing are at the hub of making Mind Matters into a blog that represents quality information that can be used globally. They are eager to support staff members who are interested in sharing viewpoints, information and fresh takes on a wide array of topics with a mental health angle.

For a set of blog guidelines or if you have an idea or want more information, simply contact Dr. Stevens. An informational lunch and learn is forthcoming for anyone interested in blogging.

Honorees & holidays to be celebrated December 12

All staff who have reached landmark service anniversaries will be lauded at the Service Recognition Program Thursday, December 12. Each will receive their service lanyard pins from their executive and manager.

A catered organization-wide mocktail and hors d’oeuvres reception amid sparkling lights and decorations in the main dining room will immediately follow the program.

Save 3-5 pm on your calendar and watch for additional information on The Link.
Part 2: Self-care improves patient care & work tasks

Whether you participate in direct patient care or support departments, your capacity to be your best self in the workplace can be improved by practicing mindfulness.

In the October 25 Self-care Moment program presented by Avani Thakkar, MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC, she asked “Is your mind full or mindful?” Great question, isn’t it?

By incorporating mindful practices, you empower yourself to:

- Have moment by moment awareness of your experience without judgment
- Orient and focus on the present moment
- Develop stable and grounded attention; a steady mind
- Become what we think

Thakkar shared ways to cultivate mindfulness that are simple – laughter, dance, meditation, drawing and breathing. For breathing she suggested that you might try alternating breathing in one nostril and exhaling out the other 10 times. Or you might ground yourself by touching your thumb and index finger on each hand (see photo below) while taking deep breaths, focusing on feeling your body relax in the process.

Many research studies show that these self-regulation practices build cognitive flexibility, self-awareness, fewer distractions, and increased resilience and decreased stress – all assets whether you work in patient care or you crunch data.

If you’re intrigued with self-care and mindfulness, check out the apps, visit these websites and sign up for the monthly challenge that PCS and the Menninger Wellness Committee is following.

**Resources**

**SMARTPHONE APPS**
- Insight Timer
- Stop, Breathe & Think
- Calm

**WEBSITES**
- http://www.freemindfulness.org
- https://goamra.org
- http://www.pocketmindfulness.com

“Wherever you are, be there totally.”
– Eckhart Tolle
Community welcomes new CEO at reception

*Right:* Board Chair Jeff Paine, CEO Armando Colombo and Stephen Maislin, CEO, Houston Community Foundation

*Right:* Dr. Efrain Bleiberg, ATP, and local child psychiatrist Dr. Robbie Wright

*Above:* Cynthia Mulder, LCSW, and Dr. Jim Lomax

*Middle right:* Michael and Stacy Ellington, who will host the 2020 Menninger luncheon

*Right:* Donors Bruce and Lida Arendale with Board Chair Emeritus Rob Wilson
Welcome aboard

- Nneka Okafor, MD, will be joining the Internal Medicine on-call team this month. She is currently assistant professor in the Baylor College of Medicine Department of Family and Community Medicine.

- Maxie Tarver is a new MHA on CPAS.

- Selenos Azzam has joined Pathfinder as a resident advisor.

Departures

- Elizabeth Klein who served two years as a resident advisor for Pathfinder.

Transitions

- Robin “Roc” Evans is transferring from Dietary to Office Services, succeeding Lenton Hymes who left in early October.

Kudos

- Joshua Haney, IT, has earned certification as a Lean Six Sigma (LSS) professional from the Six Sigma Global Institute.

- November 3-9 is the National Medical Staff Services Awareness Week, and Liz Golmon has been recertified by the National Association Medical Staff Services as a Certified Professional Medical Services Management (CPMSM).

BridgeUp at Menninger on program at NAMI Texas Conference

Patricia Gail Bray, PhD, will present a breakout session on Improving Adolescent Mental Health on November 9 at the NAMI Texas conference at the Houston Marriott West Loop.

Dr. Bray, executive director of BridgeUp at Menninger, will be sharing how the program and its grantees are achieving proven outcomes in mental health, social and emotional learning with vulnerable students in Houston schools.
Advancement of knowledge – research presentations

Dr. Taek Oh, computational psychiatry postdoctoral fellow, presented his research that investigated the differences in brain connectivity in patients with high substance use at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience in Chicago. The project included study MIND-MB data.

Ramiro Salas, PhD, presented recently at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, site of that chapter’s conference of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. He presented MIND-MB data on classifying suicidal patients with brain imaging and on the interaction between genetics and brain function in suicidality.

Pictured at top left: Hyuntaek “Taek” Oh, PhD
At lower left: Ramiro Salas, PhD

Have you taken the pulse survey?

A handful of key questions comprise the quarterly pulse survey. Responses are due Wednesday, November 6. All results are confidential.

Energage has emailed the workplace survey to all faculty, staff and trainees. Results help keep our organization continuously improving.

Sign up to receive e-newsletters sent to referents & consumers

Staff may sign up to receive The Menninger Minute with helpful information and articles that anyone can use, as well as our e-newsletter for referral sources. Simply email Bree Scott, marketing manager, and let her know what newsletters you would like to receive.

Clinic’s match for retirement returns to 5%

Starting January 1, 2020, any employee making personal contributions to the Menninger retirement plan with Fidelity will receive a 5% match from Menninger, a 2% increase.

Prepare for flu season

Protect your family and our workplace community by getting a flu shot in the Infection Control Lab.

The goal is to attain the Joint Commission’s 100% compliance standard with documentation of all faculty and staff who have received the vaccination or have declined for medical or religious reasons. Learn more on The Link’s Infection Control page.

Patio’s pergola getting new shade cover

A blue sail style shade cover for the entire patio adjacent to the pool will be installed this month.

The previous cover had weakened the wooden pergola, making it unsafe.
Costumes galore

Halloween personalities of all types appeared across the organization. Pictured above are many of Hope’s team members.

At left are Connie Brown, Deb Henderson, Durf Wood, Veronica Sevilla and Tina Baugh.

Below are Dalanna Burris, left, and her daughter, Rebekah Zamora, who ran as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at the recent 5K Monster Mash run.
Downtime coordinator changes

As we all know, Downtime refers to a period in which Cerner is inaccessible. Not being prepared for such events can lead to risks and may potentially affect clinical outcomes. The Menninger Clinic has streamlined processes in place to ensure the safety of our staff and patients. A Downtime Kit is available in each department/unit. The kit contains paper version of forms needed for documentation, guidelines to assist, training materials and checklists to help champions manage a downtime event.

Previously, the Cerner Downtime Project was led by the Strategy Management Department. We are pleased to announce that going forward, Khalila Walker, accreditation coordinator and patient advocate, will serve as the owner for Downtime. For any Downtime-related questions or concerns, please contact Khalila at 5058.

Where will we rank in 2019?

On November 17 when the Houston Chronicle publishes the Top Workplaces in the community we will learn where Menninger ranks among mid-size employers.

Cleaning up logos & brand identity involves everyone

“Menninger begins with me” applies to all staff members because we are ambassadors of Menninger, helping create positive experiences and perceptions for patients, families, donors, visitors, referring professionals, business associates, peers in the community, neighbors and others.

This summer the organization rolled out its new visual identity with a brighter palette of colors and photography depicting the joy and authenticity of what mental health means to those who turn to Menninger for help.

Important and easy ways for you to support making Menninger shine are:

- **Using one of our new PowerPoint slide options.** These are available on The Link, Marketing page and in the Slides and Templates section.
- **Updating forms and documents you repeatedly use plus your email signature block with the current Menninger logo (see illustration at left).** Believe it or not, some older documents and other uses still display the logo from prior to 2011. The logos are similar but clearly different in what is called the shield. See the difference at left. If you find items with the old logo that you cannot update, please contact Nancy Trowbridge. She will track down the item’s owner so it can be brought up to date. The Menninger logo is available on the Marketing page of The Link.
- **Becoming familiar with our public-facing website – MenningerClinic.org – that launched in August.**

Each opportunity listed is an important way to make a great impression about Menninger as one of the best places for mental health treatment, training and research.

What’s next?
The organization has been exploring opportunities for elevating the experience for patients at our front door and in the decision-making process. Findings and how we can support this effort will be shared soon.
Laughter as good medicine for the patient & clinician

By Thanksgiving, psychiatrists nationwide and the majority of referring professionals in Marketing’s database will be receiving the Menninger Connections newsletter in the mail. Highlights about our clinicians, our programs, our new CEO and educational events will be featured.

John Bouras, MD, researched and wrote an article offering advice to clinicians in private practice and sharing the belief in humor in the clinician’s toolbox for patient care and in teamwork.

Following is the Connections article by Dr. Bouras.

Humor is about the realization of incongruity between concept and situation – we laugh when things surprise us because they seem out of place. It can be seen in the game of peek-a-boo with infants, to “stealing” someone’s nose in young children, to dad jokes and word puns with older children. We seek it watching comedy stand-ups and funny TV shows and movies.

Is there a connection between laughter and happiness? I believe so. But, are we happy because we laugh or do we laugh because we are happy? It’s like the chicken and the egg analogy.

Laughter releases “feel-good” endorphins that promote an overall sense of well-being. It boosts the immune system, improves cardiovascular health, decreases pain perception and improves overall physical health. Laughter also improves stress resilience by relieving physical tension, reducing stress hormones and helping reassess cognitive distortions. Laughter promotes social connection and bonding and increases the sense of belongingness and acceptance in groups. We feel happy and we engage in shared activities that promote laughter, further strengthening our relationships and our outlook in life.

Do you use humor or laughter in your clinical practice?
Just because our patients may have a “serious” mental illness does not mean that they cannot benefit from appropriate use of humor and laughter. Contrary to some myths, psychiatric patients are able to enjoy humor. It was from a patient with schizophrenia resolving psychosis that I first heard the following joke, “Why is 6 afraid of 7? Because 7 ate 9.” We both laughed. Shared laughter helped this patient feel accepted, more connected to me, improving the therapeutic alliance and promoting medication adherence.

In our hospital milieu, newly admitted patients are called “pebbles.” This is because they are assigned “rocks,” patients...
Laughter as good medicine – continued

who have been in the milieu for a longer period of time, and who provide support in acclimating to the new setting. When I asked one of my patients about being a “pebble,” she heard that I was asking her about having “pimples.” Diffusing the misunderstanding with humor helped reduce her anxiety and it opened up a deeper discussion about her insecurities, body image issues and low self-esteem. Besides the use of rating scales, I often notice a person’s increased smiling and laughter as an index of their therapeutic progress.

There have been efforts to incorporate humor and laughter in treatment of patients with mental illness. This was achieved by formally watching humorous movies, having open groups with “call for jokes” followed by a “humorous activity,” such as games, songs, dances or skits emphasizing cooperation. The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH), which includes psychotherapists, psychiatrists, counselors, teachers, nurses and other health professionals, actively promotes the use of humor in psychiatric settings.

I see the benefit of using humor not only in my relationship with the patients, but also in my relationship with my colleagues and teammates. Patients in our program typically stay in treatment for 6-8 weeks. This allows the team to get to know the patients well in a short period of time. We empathize with their life’s experiences and their struggles to get unstuck in life. This could easily place staff at risk for burnout, but good team work and support for one another, especially through the use of humor, seems to play a protective role. I use humor during my daily interactions with colleagues both formally and informally. The team actually had fun naming our biweekly team process group as BYOB (bring your own brain). And of course, we set the tone at the beginning of each session, by sharing a joke.

Humor promotes mentalizing skills, such as curiosity, imagination and different perspective taking. It’s always a joy to see how some playfulness can create a space when one can relax, feel accepted and respected without worrying about being judged. Discussion of difficult cases and looking at countertransference and splitting within the team helps the team better understand and conceptualize the patient, which ultimately produces better outcomes.

“Super therapists,” such as Ellis, Perls, Erickson, Satir, Rogers and Whitaker, have been observed to use humor. You may or may not be a super therapist, but if you are not yet utilizing humor in your practice, what are you waiting for? It can only improve your patients’ outcome and improve your quality of life.

Share a joke with your office mate. If you are in solo practice with another colleague in the same building or in the same town, look at the silver lining of a bad situation and give it a humorous twist.

Remember to not take yourself too seriously, and remember to laugh and to laugh often.

Efforts to strengthen continuum of care for adults

Too often new clinicians have gone all-in while learning Menninger’s team approach, their new roles and systems. What leaders have found is there’s a void in understanding the continuum of services at Menninger.

The Adult Treatment Service Line Committee is working to change that. The goals are to inform existing and new clinicians of the full continuum for adults, how to refer within Menninger and to get to know Menninger clinicians in the continuum’s programs.

Starting this month, clinicians who join and have recently joined the staff are invited to make important rounds with programs, such as the outpatient clinic in Bellaire, Pathfinder and Menninger 360, as well as staff members in the Care Coordination Center, Admissions and Marketing.

The purpose is to provide an optimal treatment experience and outcome for adults who can benefit from the growing array of treatment services. Equally important is facilitating relationship building on Team Menninger, learning insights about the programming and solving specific needs for patients making a transition in their treatment.

The committee is also gathering data to measure transfers within the continuum and the disposition of patients who are referred outside of Menninger.

For more information, contact Matt Estey, LCSW, or Mychal Riley, LCSW.