

THE ROLE OF MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS IN GAMBLING RECOVERY

As most gambling counselors and therapists will attest, there's no single treatment that works across the board for all clients. However, meditation and other mindfulness-based therapies, which have increased in popularity, are showing promise in helping people cope with a range of mental health conditions, including gambling addiction.

What is Mindfulness?

First, what exactly is mindfulness? While definitions vary slightly depending on the context, all center around the concept of moment-to-moment awareness without expectation. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), "mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying

attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally."

Ollie Stocker, LICSW, LADC, MN-CGC, a therapist at Fairview Recovery Services who both practices meditation personally and encourages his clients to try it, feels that mindfulness and meditation work hand in hand. "I see meditation—in all its various forms, such as focusing on breath, focusing on senses, listening to guided meditations, etc.—to be the basic training, the boot camp of mindfulness. The goal is to do some daily meditation practice that you can then carry over to everyday activities. Even if one is unable to integrate mindfulness practices into everyday living, it is minimally effective to have 20-30 minutes of calming relaxation."

The concept of "practice" is an important aspect. "I refer to mindfulness as a 'practice' because it takes time to develop the skills needed to maintain mindfulness and meditate for any significant amount of time," says Susan Campion, MS, LACD, ICGC-II, problem gambling group counselor at Fairview Recovery Services. "We generally start open group with a five-minute meditation and encourage clients to grow their practice at home."

Why Consider Meditation and Mindfulness?

"Gamblers are impulsive and lack self-regulation skills, which makes it difficult for them to manage urges and cravings," says Ollie. Meditation quiets the "monkey

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NORTHSTAR TO CREATE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

With an eye toward strengthening the alliance that forms the organization's foundation, Northstar is working to engage in a new strategic planning process that will be underway later this fall. "I think this is a good time to revisit what we're all about and to create focused goals that we can all agree on as we move forward," says Susan Sheridan Tucker, who became

Northstar's new executive director in August.

An integral part of the process will be to understand the interests of Northstar stakeholders and members of the alliance. "Each person or organization connected to Northstar has a reason for being involved," says Susan. "Understanding and listening

to the varied voices of the alliance will help us to develop a cohesive plan that best supports and meets Northstar's mission, and strengthens our position as a preeminent resource for the problem gambling community in Minnesota."

Input will be sought from as many stakeholders as possible. This includes

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Susan Sheridan Tucker
Executive Director
NPGA

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Charting an Updated Strategic Path

With about eight weeks under my belt at NPGA, I've been taking time to better understand the ins and outs of the organization. I've been meeting with our board members and other key stakeholders to inquire about and listen to organizational histories, personal stories and hopes for the future. Each of these encounters will help me as I work with the board to envision NPGA's future path.

I come to this position with many years of leading nonprofits through various developmental cycles. I've found that while most organizations believe their issues are unique, they really aren't. Instituting change, even when desired, may not be easy, but transitions work best when they are strategic and when there is complete buy-in from stakeholders.

For me, engaging in a strategic planning process is one of the most enlightening exercises for an organization undergoing transition. It enables the organization to name and celebrate their areas of mission-driven success, to identify their growing edges and to set aside less-than-optimal practices.

Strategic planning is a vital piece to any organization's health. It's an opportunity to look under the hood, fill up the necessary fluids to keep the engine running and to replace any parts that have worn with wear and tear or just simply don't work anymore. The process can also reenergize stakeholders. It's an opportunity to think about the big picture, to take the time to evaluate an organization's place within the current landscape and to consider what may be coming along that may need to be incorporated into the organization's plans.

We'll engage in this process in the coming months and I hope you will join us in this effort. I expect to reach out to as many stakeholders as possible through online surveys and in-person gatherings. Your input is necessary and valuable. Northstar, of course, remains committed to serving the problem gambling community and through this process will strengthen its presence as an alliance.

Look for more details to come.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

We thank all our members, donors, volunteers and affiliates who have contributed to our mission.

Become a member today. Visit www.NorthstarProblemGambling.org to join us.

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance is a nonprofit agency whose mission is to help those affected by problem gambling in Minnesota. We do this by promoting awareness and understanding of the issue via our website, newsletter, community education programs, sponsorship of the Minnesota State Conference on Problem Gambling, and training of professionals in preventing and treating problem gambling.

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CHARITABLE GAMBLING VENUES DEBUT SPORTS-THEMED TIP BOARDS

Sports-themed tip boards, gambling games that are tied to the scores and outcomes of professional sports, are now available in Minnesota through licensed charities. Use of these games was approved by Minnesota's Gambling Control Board in July following the Supreme Court's ruling in May that effectively legalized sports gambling. However, while the court's ruling may have spurred the state to offer sports-themed tip boards, the boards are not the type of traditional sports gambling that the landmark court decision covers.

What Are Sports-Themed Tip Boards?

Football betting boards, also known as football squares, are games that start with a 10-by-10 grid that creates 100 individual boxes. (There are also games in which 10 boxes are created.) Each box is assigned a universal price, such as \$1 per box.

Prior to the game, participants purchase individual boxes until all boxes are accounted for. (Charities may close the game even when not all boxes are purchased.) The numbers 0 through 9 are then assigned to the columns and rows so that each box corresponds to two numbers, one for the column and one for the row. Typically, one axis represents the last digit score of the home team and the other axis represents the last digit score of the visiting team.

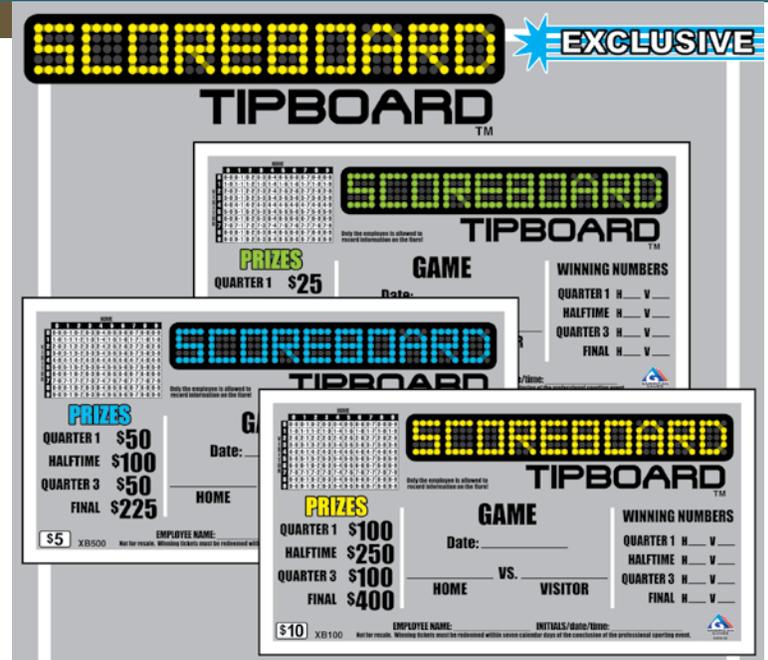
The winner of the game is the person who has the correct digits of the final score. So, for example, let's say a person gets a square that corresponds to a 9 for the Packers column and a 2 for the Vikings row. Should the score at the end of the game—or at the end of the quarters or the half should the game be structured that way—be Vikings 32, Packers 29, that person would win the pool.

There are significant differences between sports boards offered by charities and actual sports betting. In traditional sports betting, a person typically picks a team that they think will win based on point spreads or odds, as well as their knowledge of the teams playing. In contrast, the boards sold through charitable gambling establishments do not require any knowledge about the teams involved, nor do players pick a square knowing what numbers they are going to get. Therefore, it's totally a game of chance, although it does use the outcome of the event to determine the winner of the money.

Tax Advantages for Charities

Sports-themed games are important for charities seeking to raise money for their missions and who struggle to make much money because of tax and other obligations. "Sports boards are a tool that has the potential to deliver additional dollars to charities," says Al Lund, executive director of Allied Charities of Minnesota (ACM).

Unlike most other games offered by Minnesota charities, sports boards are tax-free for charities. Sports-themed tip boards were legalized by the state legislature as part of the stadium bill that authorized electronic pull tabs to pay for a new Vikings stadium. The tax structure of the bill was designed to provide relief for charitable gambling operators who found it increasingly difficult to net money for their missions.



Looking Ahead

"We expect that sports-themed tip boards will become more popular products as people better understand how they work and as the football season progresses," says Al. "While football boards have been played covertly over the years, we hope that more Minnesotans will play them legally so that they raise money for communities and their missions." It's also ACM's position that the potential for abuse in the form of gambling addiction is lower when games are played in a physical place rather than when participants play from their homes.

The amount of charitable gambling that takes place in Minnesota is higher than in any other state and growing rapidly. According to an article in the August 25 edition of the *Star Tribune*, charitable gambling sales in Minnesota have surged past \$2 billion annually, twice the amount wagered five years ago.

For more information about charitable gambling in Minnesota, visit Allied Charities of Minnesota (alliedcharitiesmn.org/). ACM is a non-profit 501(c)(6) trade association representing Minnesota charities that hold a charitable gambling license.

CELEBRATING THE PAST, ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE

Northstar's transition from former executive director Cathie Perrault to new executive director Susan Sheridan Tucker provides a good opportunity to look back on what's been accomplished over the last decade—and to look forward to what can be achieved in the future.

LOOKING BACK

Cathie served as Northstar's executive director from Oct. 2009 to August 2018. During this time, Northstar grew significantly both in scope and stature. She oversaw the development of an infrastructure that took Northstar from a veritable toddler to a capable young adult. Northstar now enjoys increased credibility and recognition in the field, and is well respected by the media, state legislators and those who provide and benefit from problem gambling services.

Here are some of the major achievements made during Cathie's tenure at Northstar:

Expanding Operation

- Growth in annual budget from \$175,000 to more than \$400,000
- Growth in staff to two full-time employees and three freelancers (outreach program manager, writer and designer)

Increased Outreach

- More than doubled the number of community presentations made (to treatment programs and community facilities) and conferences attended

Updated Website

- Two website updates in nine years
- Averaging more than 3,200 monthly visitors to website in 2018

Communications

- Established quarterly newsletter (*Northern Light*) that serves as primary information source for professionals working with gamblers, interested community members, gamblers in recovery, state legislators and others

(newsletter received award from the National Council on Problem Gambling in 2012)

- Established social media presence, allowing Northstar to find new ways to share key messages with various audiences
- Growth in database from a few paper lists to a comprehensive list of approximately 9,000
- Development of materials targeting specific groups (lawyers, gambling employees, older adults, people in recovery from other addictions) to help identify potential problem gamblers and highlight those most vulnerable to gambling addiction

Leading the Way in Research

- Northstar has supported and continues to fund periodic research on problem gambling awareness, student gambling behavior, gambling attitudes in the community and barriers to getting help, helping the state understand the significance of these issues and evaluate approaches to increasing education, awareness and access to treatment
- Northstar has funded research seeking to identify culturally appropriate ways to provide help to minority populations in Minnesota that have gambling problems

An Emerging Resource Hub

- Built up the state's preeminent annual problem gambling conference, making national experts available to Minnesota professionals and community members

Advocacy

- Northstar has developed and refined relationships with state legislators to ensure that the issue of problem gambling—funding, treatment and increasing awareness—is considered each time there is discussion about gambling expansion

LOOKING FORWARD

Susan became Northstar's new executive director in August. She brings a passion for non-profit management, a dedication to mission, experience working with diverse interests and populations, and a demonstrated ability to build coalitions. As Don Feeney, Northstar board president, said, "It became apparent that Susan was the right person to steer us through our next phase of growth and to help us best serve all of those affected by problem gambling."

Some of Susan's goals for the future include:

Relationship Building

"We are a bridge seeking to understand the complexities of problem gambling with all those involved through its advocacy, public awareness, research and outreach to providers and those seeking treatment. I'm looking forward to building new relationships to expand Northstar's diversity of stakeholders and partners who seek to ameliorate the impacts of problem gambling.

We need to reinvigorate our relationship with the Department of Human Services (DHS), members of the state advisory committee and treatment providers. One of my first tasks will be to spend some time with DHS, understand its grant

process and fund distribution timelines, and determine how we can work more collaboratively to ensure that each agency is able to accomplish its goals efficiently and effectively.”

Diversify Revenue Stream

“Currently, most of Northstar’s funding is received through a legislative mandate. It was a wise move for the state to adopt a provision to support education and treatment for gambling problems through the revenue collected from legalized gambling, enabling this agency to exist. Yet, things can change. It’s best if an organization plans proactively to secure its sustainability as well as inviting stakeholders to support the work.”

Strengthen Understanding of Gambling Addiction Through Expanding Outreach

“It’s clear that there is a public disconnect between acknowledging gambling as an

addiction, yet also believing it is a moral failing. Strengthening the understanding that gambling is a real addiction is an opportunity. Expanding the number of chemical dependency providers who include screening for gambling addiction is another. We should encourage bi/trilingual counselors to pursue gambling addiction certification and help create public awareness campaigns that speak directly to Minnesota’s growing cultural diversity. I’d also like Northstar to begin establishing relationships with the casinos and offering training to its employees and to work with them to establish responsible gaming policies. I would like to increase our research capacity to tell the full story of gambling throughout the state, including specifics on individual communities affected, state-centric demographic profiles of gamblers, and measuring the effectiveness of our education/outreach programs.”

Develop New Strategic Plan

“A new strategic plan will allow us to create focused goals that we can all agree on as we move forward. An integral part of the process will be to understand the interests of Northstar stakeholders and members of the alliance. Understanding and listening to the varied voices of the alliance will help us to develop a cohesive plan that best supports and meets Northstar’s mission and strengthens our position as the preeminent resource for the Minnesota problem gambling community.”

A full Q&A with Susan can be found at www.northstarproblemgambling.org/2018/08/qa-with-susan-tucker-northstars-new-executive-director.



CATHIE PERRAULT LEAVES A LEGACY OF PASSION AND VISION

Cathie Perrault stepped down as executive director in August. Here are some comments from board members regarding her contribution to Northstar over the last nine years.

“Cathie’s tenure was a time of tremendous growth for Northstar. We went from an organization that was struggling to find a role to one that is respected, accomplished, and well-positioned to grow and prosper. That this happened during Cathie’s time is no accident. While we had passion, we lacked both a plan for going forward and the management capability to pull it off. Cathie brought both, and with it came a respect not only from Minnesota, but from the problem gambling community all across the country.”

– Don Feeney, President of the Northstar Board of Directors

“Today, the Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance is a strong organization known throughout Minnesota and the nation thanks to the leadership of Cathie Perrault. Her vision and passion has guided Northstar in its growth from a grass roots idea to a fully developed entity that provides advocacy, information and support to problem gamblers and their families, while raising awareness about the impact of gambling addiction.

A leader who gives to her organization and

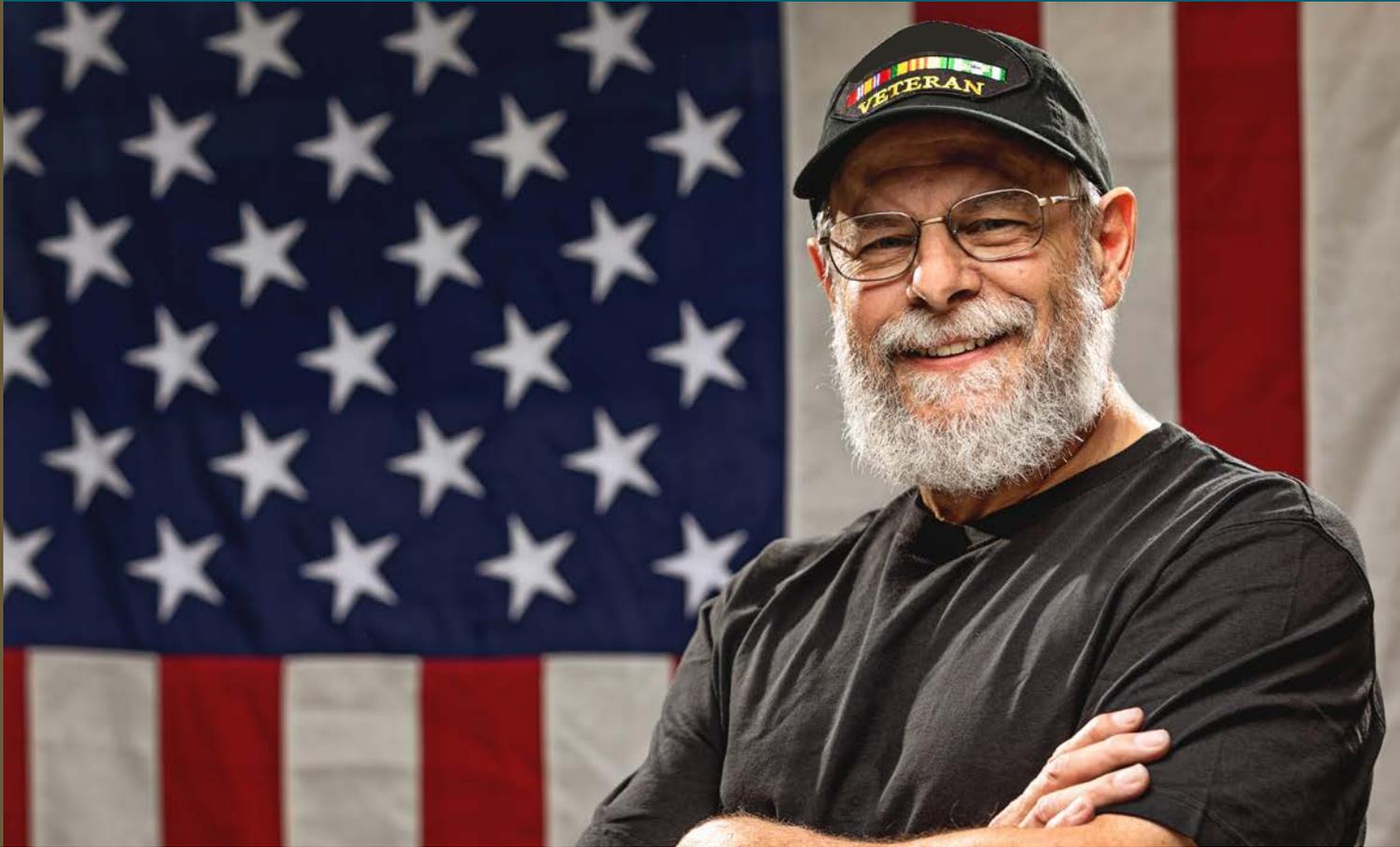
the world around her at the same time is rare. Cathie leaves Northstar in a strong position to continue its work. Her legacy of strength, vision and passion will live on in the DNA of the organization. We are grateful for her service to Northstar and wish her well in her deserved retirement.”

– John Rundquist, Crossroads Aftercare Program

Just as this issue of Northern Light was going to press, we learned that Cathie Perrault passed away unexpectedly on Oct. 28. On a professional level, Cathie’s work is well documented on these pages. On an organizational level, it’s more difficult to convey the sense of personal loss that so many of us who knew and worked with Cathie feel. Through our shock and sadness, we will endeavor to carry on Cathie’s deep sense of caring, particularly for those afflicted by the disease of addiction.

IN THEIR OWN *Words*

I'm in the process of determining my future. Given what I've learned about myself and the relationship between trauma and the ways in which we deal with it, I've given thought to taking a smart recovery position outside of St. Cloud.



After my deployment was over, I was faced with the challenge of trying to somehow match that excitement and high-tempo routine.

It's hard to replicate the adrenalin rush that one gets working in the military. For me, nothing can match the sense of doing something dangerous, and doing something dangerous for a purpose.

In my role with the Navy, I was among the boots on the ground in the Middle East. I saw the effects of war and came home with a darkness inside me that so many other veterans have experienced.

After my deployment was over, I was faced with the challenge of trying to somehow match that excitement and high-tempo routine. Of course there is no substitute in civilian life for what I did while with the Navy, but I tried to find it.

The closest I could come was gambling. It offered me some of the same aspects of life in the Navy: adrenalin, something to engage in, and a form of escapism. It's only recently that I've begun to understand the connection and similarity between the highs of gambling and my life in the Navy.

My gambling started in a very casual way. I remember taking a long drive into the mountains when I was based in the Washington, DC, area. I ended up at a casino in West Virginia by complete accident. I enjoyed myself and it was simply fun recreation.

My gambling didn't really become a problem until I left the Navy in 2006. I started going two to three times a week and

it was my only real outlet. It became my social pastime.

I continued to gamble for much of the next ten years. But things really went off the rail in 2016, when I was a taxi driver and made frequent stops at a casino in the small town where I lived. Rather than wait for the phone to ring to transport passengers from the casino, I would end up *inside* the casino spending all the money I earned that day. Things got very bad and life felt hopeless.

At this point, I knew I had a problem. But I wasn't sure that anything could be done about it, nor did I know how I could actually get help.

Then an unexpected thing happened. While on Instagram, I was viewing photos from an old Navy colleague. I didn't recognize the buildings in his photos and decided to message him to learn more. He told me they were from Minneapolis. When I asked, "Why Minneapolis?" he explained that he was in Minnesota after getting out of a VA rehab facility in St. Cloud.

When we eventually talked—for the first time in about 10 years—it all started making sense. I knew him personally and knew about his dangerous streak, so hearing that he was in rehab made sense. I also saw many parallels to my story. I asked him questions about the process and then obtained the link for the VA facility that could help me.

As soon as I got off the phone, I started packing my car. I drove three days to make it to St. Cloud from the west coast. I didn't even call ahead of time and walked right to the urgent care desk and said, "I need help." I was feeling suicidal and couldn't take no for an answer.

When I got to St. Cloud, I told the doctor that in addition to a problem with drug and alcohol addiction I also had a gambling problem. I was placed in a residential treatment program on July 14 with a dual addiction diagnosis and stayed for 60 days. Until then, I didn't know that treatment programs like this existed.

A part of the program involved cognitive behavioral therapy. During these sessions, I gained a better understanding of how my

actions were related to the trauma I suffered in the Navy and how the things I did were efforts to try to deal with that trauma. When you get into a program like this, you see the bigger picture. More importantly, you see that this addiction can be managed and that it can be cured.

I'm trying to start anew in a place where I have no routine connected with gambling and where there is no casino in town. I'm living in the House of Charity in Minneapolis and am following through with my aftercare, including meeting with a therapist to keep me on my path.

... when I was a taxi driver and made frequent stops at a casino in the small town where I lived. . . I would end up inside the casino spending all the money I earned that day. Things got very bad and life felt hopeless.

I'm in the process of determining my future. Given what I've learned about myself and the relationship between trauma and the ways in which we deal with it, I've given thought to taking a smart recovery position outside of St. Cloud, something that would require a certification program. From past experience, I realize that I have to feel fulfilled in my occupation or it won't work.

I'm prepared for this to be a long, slow process. But that's OK. It's taken me a long time to get to this point and I realize how important it was for me to get there.

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NORTHSTAR TO CREATE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

treatment providers, therapists, researchers, state legislators, members of the recovery community, casinos and the gaming industry. "It's important we get buy-in not just from our board, but other stakeholders as well," says Susan. There will be numerous opportunities for participation in the process. Information will be obtained through surveys, retreats and meetings. Collecting feedback from stakeholders is critical to this interactive process.

"Once initial input is obtained, we'll look for themes and start to formulate ideas," says Susan. "At that point, additional feedback will be sought before organizational goals are mapped out. This process will likely generate some aspirational goals (very long term), as well as those that can be accomplished within 3-5 years."

Susan emphasized that development of the strategic plan will be a very transparent process. Periodic updates will be posted on Northstar's website and social media. The process is expected to begin in November. The goal is to have a working strategic plan by summer.



Share a Recovery Story

Stories of recovery from compulsive gambling provide hope to those currently struggling with the addiction and their families. If you or someone you know would like to share your story, please contact Linda at linda@NorthstarProblemGambling.org or (651) 424-8595. Your identity will not be disclosed.

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THE ROLE OF MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS IN GAMBLING RECOVERY

mind” associated with gambling while mindfulness keeps clients in the present and less focused on past mistakes or future concerns. Thus, it can help gamblers, who tend to operate on autopilot and respond to addictive urges without awareness, according to Ollie.

Other reasons that gamblers can benefit from meditation and mindfulness is to realize the cognitive distortions and rationalizations that may take place when they gamble. Additionally, the majority of gambling patients have co-occurring disorders, such as other addictions or mental health issues, which can also benefit from mindfulness practices.

Effectiveness of Mindfulness

Both evidence-based practices and anecdotal reports have supported the notion that mindfulness can be effective. A study conducted in 2010 (“Short-Term Meditation Induces White Matter Changes In the Anterior Cingulate,” by Tang et al.) found improvements in white matter integrity after four weeks of meditation training. These improvements were evident in brain areas involved in neural communication from and to the anterior cingulate cortex, a central area of the brain known to be involved in controlling cognition and emotion.

A study of mindfulness and problem gambling treatment conducted by the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario

at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health found that participants who completed mindfulness practices averaged a 4.40 MAAS (mindful attention awareness scale) score after treatment compared to 3.65 before. (The MAAS is a 15-item scale designed to assess a core characteristic of dispositional mindfulness, namely, open or receptive awareness of and attention to what is taking place in the present.)

Another study (“Mindfulness-Enhanced Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Problem Gambling: A Controlled Pilot Study,” *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 12:2, 197-205.) in which one group of participants received cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and the other received both CBT and mindfulness training demonstrated that those receiving the mindfulness training experienced significantly reduced gambling urges and psychiatric symptoms. The study further showed that those practicing mindfulness continued to show improved outcomes at three months.

Treatment Implications and Guidance

Given the experiential nature of meditation, patients need to practice it. Ollie says it’s important to include some type of meditation practice in each session and to include daily meditation as part of a patient’s treatment plan. Patients benefit from being given meditation resources to

learn about ways to meditate and how to practice it daily.

At Fairview, patients are introduced to mediation in their first group session with a five-minute meditation. Other forms of meditation, such as yoga, coloring, breathing exercises or prayer, are also recommended. “Having clients share how coloring mandalas for 10 minutes helps quiet their brain is a powerful moment for many,” says Susan.

Ideally, gambling counselors that encourage clients to practice meditation are daily meditators or mindfulness practitioners themselves. Counselors are also encouraged to make referrals to meditation or MBSR classes, as meditation is more powerful in group settings according to Ollie. They may also recommend some of the many free resources online and available apps that help patients learn meditation.

If you’d like to view Ollie Stocker’s PowerPoint presentation, including a list of books and resources, please visit www.northstarproblemgambling.org/reports-presentations.



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