

# CHICAGO TONIGHT

## Health

### Loyola University Offers Medical Students Meditation to Combat Stress

Paul Caine | Meredith Francis | February 25, 2016 5:40 pm



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Medical students are stressed. In fact, to anyone who's watched "Grey's Anatomy" or "E.R.," you would almost expect it to be part of a trainee doctor's job description. That stress can have potentially deadly consequences and also lead many medical students to drop out.

But now, in what is claimed to be a first for a major U.S. medical school, Loyola University Chicago's Stritch School of Medicine is offering an elective class in Transcendental Meditation (TM) to allow their trainee physicians to heal themselves.

According to the Mayo Clinic, meditation has been practiced for thousands of years. But "meditation" is actually just an umbrella term for the different ways to achieve a relaxed state of being. Anything from

yoga and tai-chi to prayer and a type of focused walking are considered meditation. The clinic describes TM as “a simple, natural technique.”

With TM, Mayo's website states, “you silently repeat a personally assigned mantra, such as a word, sound or phrase, in a specific way. This form of meditation allows your body to settle into a state of profound rest and relaxation and your mind to achieve a state of inner peace, without needing to use concentration or effort.”

The class at Loyola, which was first launched during the 2014-2015 school year, was designed to help medical students deal with the unusually high levels of stress that come with studying and working in the medical field.

In addition to a lecture series by leading researchers in TM, students actually practice the technique themselves, usually for 15 to 20 minutes twice a day.

Dani Terrell is a second-year medical student at Loyola who has been through the class. With three to four lectures a day in addition to her clinical duties, Terrell said she works anywhere from 60 to 90 hours a week. She said practicing TM has changed her life.

“It’s changed the kind of person that I am inside and out,” Terrell said. “Part of that is because it really lets you maximize your full potential – the kind that everyone knows that they have inside but gets impeded upon by all these tiny obstacles and stresses that come up every day.”

The benefits of TM go far beyond helping medical students manage their stress. The Mayo Clinic says TM has been proven to help address a myriad of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. It can also improve focus and learning ability.

“That first day [of the TM class], you learn how to meditate,” Terrell said. “And that first day I just had such a calm and clarity and extreme rest. I think that’s one of the things that’s most appealing ... you have this profound rest that I think most people don’t even get when they go to sleep – and you have it in 20 minutes.”

According to Mayo, TM has benefits for a person’s physical well-being, too. Practicing the technique has been associated with better heart health, like reducing high blood pressure or an elevated heart rate. It can also ease migraines and the effects of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

“I think most of the students who have taken the course and stuck with it have found it equally as life-altering,” Terrell said. “A lot of students had migraines, and since they started TM, they don’t have migraines anymore because they were triggered by stress.”

In an increasingly demanding work culture, doctors and researchers are making the move to promote TM as complementary medicine.

TM instructor Carla Brown and Dr. Linda Brubaker, Dean of the Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine, also join "Chicago Tonight" for a discussion on TM.