

Tending the Field of Mindfulness-Based Programs: The Development of International Integrity Guidelines for Teachers and Teacher Training

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Abstract

Since Jon Kabat-Zinn first introduced a contemporary, secularized application of mindfulness for the relief of pain and stress in physical health-care settings, there has been a significant and rapid expansion of the range of mindfulness-based programs (MBPs) designed for various health care, education, workplace, and other settings. As is common with developing programs, these often run ahead of carefully considered and researched effectiveness evaluations. This raises questions of how to best train mindfulness teachers to skillfully facilitate such interventions while minimizing the potential for harm. In this article, we describe the work of an international group of senior teacher trainers who met to develop guidelines on the ethics and standards for teacher trainers and their training pathways. In this article, we will define MBPs; describe the process by which these international guidelines were developed; and share details of the collaborative team who made up the international network that worked on them. We offer these guidelines as “living documents” that specifically set out: (1) ethical standards for mindfulness teachers and trainers; (2) criteria and standards for teacher trainers; and (3) criteria and standards for training pathways. As “living documents,” these will continue to be commented on and refined over time. Given that MBPs offered within secular settings in most countries currently have limited oversight or accreditation processes, we hope these guidelines will provide support and clarity to the teachers of all established and emerging MBPs, and their trainers and supervisors.

Keywords

ethical guidelines for mindfulness teaching, international guidelines, mindfulness, mindfulness-based programs integrity, mindfulness teacher guidelines, mindfulness teacher training guidelines

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Introduction

We are at a critical moment in the development of mindfulness-based programs (MBPs)¹ and indeed the role of mindfulness in wider society. Since the first Western applications of mindfulness in medicine and health care offered in the format of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction,² there has been an exponential rise in the number of trainings, programs, and adaptations in what was once a rather sparse field. This is very good news: providing more innovative and evidenced-based programs by trained teachers that contribute to a deeper understanding of mindfulness in the public domain. However, we are also seeing the influence of the marketplace on this field, giving rise to a

proliferation of quick-fix courses and techniques offered by often minimally trained teachers. Furthermore, recent research findings are demonstrating that there can be

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unwanted effects from meditation practice that require both skillful handling^{3,4} and further investigation.⁵

At this critical juncture in the teaching and training of MBPs, we are faced with the need for careful and caring scrutiny of the quality of all existing and newer mindfulness-based programs, the training and preparation of the teachers, and the impact of the many and varied mindfulness courses being offered. The intention of these guidelines is to ensure that teachers are consistent across all MBPs in offering their participants mindfully embodied presence along with appropriate skills and frameworks that support human growth and flourishing with the potential for healing and transformation. We also wish to guide the ways in which teachers advertise, offer, and fund their programs to ensure they are grounded in ethical considerations that are committed to integrity, transparency, openness, relational responsibility, and clarity around limitations, while recognizing the needs we have for viable livelihoods. The thoroughness and robustness of mindfulness-based program teacher training demand a unique commitment and cost. Like other professions, there are skills and competencies that are taught and evaluated. However, one of the central requirements of teacher training integrity is having a personal meditation practice, which is a much more difficult element to assess. It is especially hard to assess how this practice translates into an individual's embodied expression within the teaching, although much work has been done to develop tools that can evaluate this for the purposes of training and research fidelity.⁶⁻⁸

There is now a range of published articles on mindfulness teacher training pathways⁹⁻¹⁴ as well as preliminary attempts to correlate teacher training pathways with MBP outcomes.^{15,16} This body of literature needs to be widened to include evolving mindfulness-based courses and will be usefully informed by articles which lay out principles for assessing intervention integrity such as those by Crane and Hecht,⁷ and Crane.¹⁰

Therefore, with this rush of emergent programs and training pathways, it is timely to formally articulate and disseminate the training standards and criteria that have been developed over the past forty years for the most researched programs, namely, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). These standards and criteria will be articulated in this article to provide a foundation for ongoing dialogue and to offer a potential framework for all trainings in all MBPs. We will also describe what we mean by mindfulness-based programs; the process by which these international guidelines were developed; and who made up the international network of senior international teacher trainers who worked on

them. We offer the guidelines as “living documents” that specifically set out (1) ethical standards for MBP teachers and trainers, (2) criteria and standards for teacher trainers, and (3) criteria and standards for training pathways.

As the MBPs currently offered in secular settings in most countries have limited oversight and/or accreditation, we hope these guidelines will provide guidance and clarity for all current and emergent programs and teachers. Aspiring to best practices, and committing to a sense of integrity and quality, will assist a cooperative effort toward disciplined growth and healthy maturation of this nascent field.

Defining Our Terms: Mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Programs

For the definition of mindfulness, the authors refer to Kabat-Zinn's operational definition¹ of mindfulness as “...the awareness arising through paying attention on purpose in the present moment ...non-judgmentally...in the service...of self-understanding, wisdom, and compassion.”¹⁷

We see the evidenced-based MBPs, specifically MBSR and MBCT, as the application and *recontextualization* of the concept of mindfulness found in the teachings and practices from Buddhist traditions as a “lived universal dharma”¹⁸ within a secular framework of experiential education which involves and also goes beyond the meditative practices, both in and out of the classroom. This secular application of mindfulness is interwoven with theoretical rationales drawn from such fields as science, medicine, psychology, and education and attempts to address the causal and maintaining factors of human distress and suffering as they manifest in a range of modern-day contexts. It includes a significant immersion in daily formal and informal mindfulness meditation practice supported by inquiry and class discussion led by the teacher; it is a lively investigation of what occurs when we change our relationship to the present moment, and to that of our physical, cognitive, and affective processes with an attitude of curiosity, interest, kindness, and acceptance. The content, process, and teacher requirements for MBPs have been laid out in a seminal article by Crane et al.¹⁹

The following table lays out the essential and flexible elements of MBPs, which will greatly inform our capacity to evaluate various offerings and their related training pathways.

| Warp | Weft |
|---|---|
| <p>MBP</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is informed by theories and practices that draw from a confluence of contemplative traditions, science, and the major disciplines of medicine, psychology and education 2. Is underpinned by a model of human experience which addresses the causes of human distress and the pathways to relieving it 3. Develops a new relationship with experience characterized by present moment focus, decentering and an approach orientation 4. Supports the development of greater attentional, emotional and behavioral self-regulation, as well as positive qualities such as compassion, wisdom, equanimity. 5. Engages the participant in a sustained intensive training in mindfulness meditation practice, in an experiential inquiry-based learning process and in exercises to develop insight and understanding <p>MBP teacher</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has particular competencies which enable the effective delivery of the MBP 2. Has the capacity to embody the qualities and attitudes of mindfulness within the process of the teaching 3. Has engaged in appropriate training and commits to ongoing good practice 4. Is part of a participatory learning process with their students, clients or patients | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The core essential curriculum elements are integrated with adapted curriculum elements, and tailored to specific contexts and populations 2. Variations in program structure, length and delivery are formatted to fit the population and context <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has knowledge, experience and professional training related to the specialist populations that the mindfulness-based course will be delivered to 2. Has knowledge of relevant underlying theoretical processes which underpin the teaching for particular contexts or populations |

Adapted with permission from Crane et al.¹⁹

How These Guidelines Were Developed and by Whom

The intention to create guidelines for teachers and teacher training pathways that would support the ongoing integrity of MBP teacher training was formed following 5 separate international meetings held in the United States and Europe, attended by recognized leaders and teachers in the field, all engaged in the teaching and training of teachers in evidence-based 8-week MBPs, most typically, MBSR and MBCT.

Such representation from various established Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organizations (MTTOs) and/or regional Teachers' Associations around the globe allowed a compelling inquiry into creating coherence in this field, especially given the various practical, contextual, and logistical realities faced in different countries and regions. This inquiry was informed by the attendees' long and rich experiences of teaching, training, and supervising others in MBSR and MBCT, as well as their long-term personal meditation and retreat experiences, and provided much of the groundwork for developing the guidelines described later in this article.

This led to a multinational meeting in 2015 in the United Kingdom, now also including the Asia Pacific and South African networks, that reached a clear consensus that the development of a collaborative

international network was needed by grassroots teacher and trainers alike to ensure the ongoing integrity of MBP teacher training.

From this 2015 international meeting, the vision and mission for this initiative was developed. These were preliminarily agreed to, as described as follows:

Vision

Our vision is to support teachers and trainers in maintaining the integrity of mindfulness-based programs that are grounded in awareness, compassion and wisdom upheld by an interconnected, diverse and global network dedicated to promoting health, well-being and ease for the benefit of all beings.

Mission

An international collaborative network of mindfulness-based teacher training organizations committed to maintaining integrity and upholding training standards of mindfulness-based programs supporting transformative inner work that allows all beings to flourish in our diverse world through the practice of mindfulness.

From this meeting, 2 groups emerged. The first was a Steering Group of well-respected senior teacher trainers in the field, referred to as the Midwives, who would support the 'birthing' of this new collaborative network. This group consisted of Tim Burnett (Director, Mindfulness NW, USA), Rebecca Crane (Director, Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice, UK), Linda Lehrhaupt (Director, Institute for Mindfulness-Based Approaches, Germany), Dawn McDonald (Senior Teacher, Institute for Mindful Leadership, Canada), Florence Meleo-Meyer (Director of Training, Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society, UMass Medical School, USA), and Camilla Skjöld (Founder, Centre for Mindfulness, Sweden).

The Steering Group then established a second group, the Transitional Working Party (TWP), to begin the work of (1) collating, articulating, and disseminating the guidelines for ethical standards and criteria for MBP teachers, teacher trainers, and training pathways; and (2) considering guidelines on structure and governance for such an international grouping.

The TWP members were nominated by the Steering Group based on the criteria below and were drawn from representatives of MTTOs and regional Teachers'

Associations from around the world representing most, but not all, geographical regions. It comprised 2 co-chairs, Günter Hudasch (Germany) and Maura Kenny (Asia Pacific), plus Allan Goldstein (USA, West Coast), Lot Heijke (Holland), Lynn Koerbel (USA, East Coast), Patricia Lück (South Africa), Catherine Phillips (Canada), and Taravajra (UK).

Eligibility Criteria for the TWP

- Seniority of at least 5 years' experience as a teacher trainer within an established MTTO or other closely related MBP teacher training organization.
- Representation of both their own training organization and the region within which they worked and were well respected, well networked, and well trusted within their wider community.
- Knowledge of local and regional training organizations—to ensure geographical, cultural, and organizational considerations were covered.

Despite the recognition and acknowledgement that there were still many regions underrepresented at this time, the geographical spread of the teacher training organizations was felt to be broad enough to begin the work.

The Work Completed to Date

Beginning in February 2016, the TWP met regularly, producing 4 sets of guidelines on:

1. Ethical Standards for Mindfulness Teachers and Teacher Trainers.
2. Criteria and Minimum Standards for Teacher Trainers.
3. Criteria and Minimum Standards for Teacher Training Pathways and Guidelines for Levels of MBP Teacher Experience.
4. Structure and Governance for an International Integrity Network for the MBPs.

The resulting documents were sent to the Steering Group in December 2016 for further review. These were then disseminated through the regional networks represented in the TWP and an overview of the work was presented at the Centre for Mindfulness, Research and Practice Mindfulness Conference in Chester, UK, in 2017.

Summaries of these guidelines and standards are presented in the following tables, and full copies can be obtained from the authors or any of the named TWP members until such time that a dedicated website is established.

Ethical Standards for Mindfulness Teachers and Trainers

| Domains of Ethics | Areas in Each Domain |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Transparency and openness | Participants are informed of all responsibilities and guidelines Participants' needs and expectations are attended to Well-being of participants prevails over economic interests |
| Integrity | Personal integrity of teacher Confidentiality Adherence to MBP principles, eg, patience, trust, acceptance Respecting copyright laws and intellectual property Fidelity to MBP curricula |
| On-going learning | Ongoing professional learning and development Supervision or peer supervision Open discussion of competence Developments in field of MBP teaching/training and research |
| Own practice | Personal daily mindfulness practice Ongoing retreat engagement Remaining in contact with foundational traditions Desisting from conversion or evangelism in relation to Buddhist teachings |
| Clarity around limitations | MBPs are not a substitute for medically indicated treatments Abide by limitations of personal competency and experience Adherence to ethical framework of teacher's professional training |
| Responsibility for relationships | Honoring boundaries in relation to participants/trainees Skillful relationships with competitors in the MBP field |
| Grievance process | Commitment to existing grievance processes and codes |

 Criteria and Standards for Teacher Trainers

| Domains of Standards | Description/Areas of Domain | Range of Criteria |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Trainer readiness | Readiness to train | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness to train mindfulness teachers should be assessed individually • Trainers should be certified level 3/senior teachers or equivalent as described in the training criteria |
| Trainer prerequisites | Meditation experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 7 years' experience in meditation and mindful movement • Minimum of 5 silent retreats of at least 5 days in length |
| | Teaching experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching responsibility for at least 15 mindfulness-based courses over a minimum of 5 years. • Keeps up with continued professional development (CPD) postcertification |
| | Training to be a trainer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained to be a trainer via an appropriate apprenticeship • Demonstrated competency in training others • Continues to teach mindfulness-based courses to people with varying levels of experience as a teacher, alongside training teachers |
| Teaching proficiency criteria | Leading groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill in creating and maintaining a safe container for learning and exploration in the face of stress, pain, illness, and suffering • Skill in large and small group dialogue and process of inquiring together as group process |
| | Supervision/mentoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified and experienced in providing mindfulness supervision and/or mentoring |
| Understanding mindfulness | Supporting new teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skillful at giving feedback that identifies strengths and learning needs |
| | Complexity of mindfulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits experiential understanding of complexity of mindfulness as an approach and its transformative potential |
| | Aims and intentions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough comprehension of aims and intentions of all curriculum components within a particular MBP |
| MBP in different contexts | Differences between MBPs and the different settings, cultural contexts and fields of application | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough comprehension of underlying theoretical principles of the MBP they are training others in • Thorough understanding of relevant current scientific and/or clinical understanding and relevant spiritual, philosophical and Buddhist traditions |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipped with capacity to train others in the principles underpinning adaptations of MBPs to different contexts and populations • Working experience in the field of application |
| Embodiment | Committed to continuous work to embody mindfulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity for deep listening, regard and compassion for all participants • Sensitivity to the use of language in relation to guiding meditation practices and navigating class dynamics • A compassionate and strong team player in the context of a training team and in connection with others who are training teachers |
| Ongoing learning | Personal mindfulness practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing participation in silent, teacher-led meditation retreats • Sustained and ongoing personal mindfulness practice, including sitting practice, inquiry and mindful movement, reinforced by ongoing study with teachers |
| | Professional training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracks current and developing evidence base for mindfulness-based interventions, with a particular emphasis on the training organization's area of expertise |
| | Self-awareness /personal process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued exploration and examination of one's own personal patterns through supervision, coaching, counseling, psychotherapy or other self-development work |

Criteria and Standards for Teacher Training Pathways

| Domain of Standards | Description of Domain | Range of Domain |
|---|--|--|
| Prerequisites (to enter the training program) | <p>Meditation and mindful movement practice</p> <p>Professional background</p> <p>MBSR or MBCT 8-week course as a participant</p> <p>Retreat Experience</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 1 year of personal mindfulness meditation practice and study in mindfulness (wisdom traditions, Buddhism, and universal dharma, and a minimum of 1 year of mindful movement practice (eg, Mindful Hatha Yoga, Chi Gong, Tai Chi) • Professional graduate degree or equivalent working experience in the field (typically health sciences, psychology, medicine, nursing or education, but other fields may also be accepted) • Experience of group work is recommended • Completion of one 8-week MBSR/MBCT course (or equivalent MBP) |
| Teaching pathways | <p>Commitment</p> <p>The different parts of a training pathway fit together and form a comprehensive program. Training can be followed through 1 pathway, modular, and/or in different institutes.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 1 silent teacher-led retreat (Residential Meditation Practice Intensives) of 5 to 7 days (which may be comprised of 2 × 2½ day retreats if, eg, people have young children or if no longer retreats locally available) • Geographical and cultural implications may require adaptations to these requirements • A commitment to ongoing personal practice and study • Any training program should offer the theory, rationale and intentions underpinning the MBP being taught with significant amounts of experiential learning, along with ample time to reflect, give and receive feedback from self, peers, and instructors • A training program includes supervision and mentoring, either through the trainers themselves or through external qualified supervisors and mentors. Co-teaching could be part of the pathway, though never replacing supervision and mentoring or a full training program • Participation in an MBP teacher training pathway does not indicate “readiness to teach or supervise or train other teachers” • Teacher/trainer readiness has to be assessed in the process of learning by the processes outlined in level 2 Criteria for certification |

Guidelines for Levels of MBP Teacher Experience

| Domain of Standards | Description of Domain | Range of Domain |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| LEVEL I Beginner MBP teacher | Contact hours to attain basic qualification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basic qualification for a teacher before starting teaching can be low under certain circumstances (eg, 120–200 h), but this can only be a starting point for the professional development. An example would be—the 8 week course (16 h), teacher training intensive (100 h), reading and preparation (6 h), and so on. This precise breakdown will vary from pathway to pathway but a minimum of 120 hours is required • A silent retreat (Residential Meditation Practice Intensive) of 5 to 7 days should be part of the training trajectory and mandatory before one starts to teach |

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| Domain of Standards | Description of Domain | Range of Domain |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| LEVEL 2 Qualified MBP teacher | Further training and maturing of teaching expertise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having taught 8 courses • Having undertaken further training of another 120 hours including supervision |
| | Content of training | <p>Crucial components of the program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • familiarization with and analysis of curriculum elements (themes, practices, presentational elements, learning activities, and group process) weekly and as a whole • embodiment of mindfulness • the skill and art to guide formal and informal practice • the theory and skill practice of delivery of psychoeducational elements of MBPs • the theory and practice of facilitating inquiry • theoretical underpinnings of the program • holding a safe group learning environment • self-reflection (which may include writing, video, audio, and other media or means of expression) • giving and receiving feedback from self, peers, and instructors • supervision (may be outsourced if not provided by the training organization) |
| | Requirements for completion of level 2 teacher training program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching: having taught 8 of the MBPs in which one is training (see supervision below) • Personal self-reflection on the teaching process and skills • Supervision: having completed at least 8 to 10 hours with a qualified supervisor covering at least 2 courses • Residential Meditation Practice Intensives: at least 2 retreats of 5 to 7 days each or (the minimum length of 5 days can be comprised of $2 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ day retreats/year if have young children or if no longer retreats locally available). These retreats should be silent, teacher-led, and can be in mindfulness or Buddhist tradition |
| | Ongoing Continuing Personal and Professional Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 to 3 days of professional training per year, including supervision, workshops, personal study, webinars, or professional conferences on Mindfulness • Regular silent teacher-led Residential Meditation Practice Intensives as described in the Ethics for trainers and teachers (at least 5 days per 2 years) |
| | Possible forms of assessment: Ongoing assessment during all phases of training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postsupervision reflection: written reflection on personal journey through mindfulness and mindful movement practice, and on one's own courses |
| | Formative feedback on teaching practice and development from more experienced teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of all teaching materials (Handbook, Audio files, etc) • Recommendations—by students, colleagues, supervisor, and/or (co-) teachers |
| | Assessment based on short version of MBI TAC or equivalent criteria. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recordings of teaching practice and accompanying written reflection reviewed and certified by teacher training organization. May be outsourced to another MTTO if certification is not possible within the providing MTTO • Audio files of guided formal practices |
| LEVEL 3: Senior teacher | Development process toward senior teacher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should be seen while teaching either in person or via video • Minimum 5 years of teaching, certified by Centers for Mindfulness that are affiliated with and recognized by the wider MBP community, and with adequate qualification to enable rigorous assessment of teaching competence • Regular teaching experience • Minimum 7 years of personal mindfulness and mindful movement practice • Minimum 5 years of Continuing Personal and Professional Development—including awareness of research and practice developments in the field nationally and internationally |

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Continued

| Domain of Standards | Description of Domain | Range of Domain |
|---------------------|-----------------------|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having taught at least 15 courses ● 5 or more silent retreats of at least 5 days each ● Personal guidance/mentorship by a teacher/trainer ● Ongoing individual mindfulness supervision—ideally monthly but a minimum of 3 to 4 sessions per year; and/or ongoing group supervision with peers with a minimum of 4 sessions per year |

As work on the structure and governance document is still in progress, it was felt that these initial documents would be released as a more immediate and relevant contribution to the field. These “living documents” are offered as best practice guidelines to be utilized by MTTOs as they develop and review their teacher training pathways and by MBP teachers as they reflect on the ethical principles that guide their work. We fully appreciate these guidelines may remain aspirational for some time as the length and cost of MBP teacher training may create unrealistic barriers for some communities, or where geographically isolated teachers are trying to establish evidence-based MBPs. Ethically balancing practical and economic realities while holding true to the integrity of the work is a mindfulness practice in itself. To be both rigorous and flexible requires spaciousness and careful consideration.

The TWP acknowledged early on in its work that a priority was to remain true to the vision described above, which highlights both integrity and inclusivity. To wisely progress this work within the many and varied communities we work and live in, relationships need to be tended to with mutual respect, healthy inquiry, and a nuanced understanding of global realities.

Future Directions

As we go forward, ongoing challenges are inevitable and will require a mixture of patience, care, wisdom, and steadiness as we meet them.

These challenges include the following:

1. Maintaining MBP teacher and training program integrity while working on increasing the accessibility and dissemination of evidence-based courses. Particular attention is needed where there are regional, cultural, and population differences.
2. Finding ways to initiate or maintain ongoing accessible and affordable training, supervision, mentoring, and course outcome evaluation.
3. Preventing fidelity drift which refers to the often-observed phenomenon where teachers (or therapists) tend to drift away from offering the original model

they were trained in, introducing their own ideas without always realizing they have done so, leaving out core components or not evaluating the outcomes for their participants/clients even if they have made any changes carefully.

4. Clarifying which new programs fit the current definitions of MBPs, identifying the standards of evidence needed to justify their inclusion, and evaluating the particular training pathways developed to prepare the teachers. This requires ongoing research (especially more effectiveness trials in different settings), judicious use of research funding to fine tune existing MBPs for some populations, and collaborations between scientists, trainers and teachers that would assist with this more targeted endeavor, rather than trying to meaningfully scope and evaluate the iterations of MBPs that are now appearing.
5. Developing a standardized certification process of both MBPs and MTTOs while paying attention to the implications for different professions, cultures, academic, and nonacademic settings. This would go some way toward safeguarding the offerings so that the public had some way of assessing the integrity of courses on offer.
6. Transitioning from the international group involved in developing these guidelines to the growing generation of leaders who will support the next steps of this work. Some plans for this are coming into focus and involve website creation, biannual meetings for further discussion, and publication of relevant articles. The structure and governance of such a leadership group needs more reflection, especially as the complexities involved in creating a global body that has a meaningful role are not insignificant. For example, the need for support of both participants and teachers in settings where there is systematized discrimination and abuse, and/or increasing social ecology threats is a pressing challenge for the mindfulness community.

Conclusions

By June 2018, these ethical standard and teacher training guidelines had been presented and circulated with the

MBP teacher training networks and organizations, but wider dissemination is still needed along with wider ranging discussions, panels, conversations, and investigations. Over time, the TWP has transitioned with some members stepping back after the initial work was completed and as new representatives joined the group. A series of biannual meetings are being planned to further clarify and discuss components of the documents and the direction of the field, with the possibility of a collaborative website being developed with an international reach for all teachers and trainers.

In the meantime, we hope that the summary tables of the documents become a valuable and practical resource to the MBP teacher trainer community that will guide best practices through minimum standards for teacher development and training that can be appropriately adapted to local contexts. The relevance and value of this work and its related documents is now for the community of MBP teachers and trainers to explore, study, and debate as we collectively and individually offer mindfulness-based programs to those who may benefit, and as we train the next generation of teachers. This is all the more crucial as MBPs move into populations, regions, cultures, and domains where classes look nothing like the generally white, relatively wealthy, heteronormative, gender-conforming populations found in the original programs. In fact, this progress is seen as timely and critical in the development of MBPs and is a welcome movement in the field, speaking deeply to the roots of contemplative practice and ethical frameworks of inclusion and equity.

Creating an environment that cultivates deep listening, openness, and respect for what is possible in diverse and underrepresented regions is critical to realizing the full potential of human flourishing through mindfulness practices. We have endeavored to do so in the development of these guidelines.

Acknowledgments

These standards and guidelines were formulated out of the deeply considered and dedicated work of many teachers and trainers, and we express gratitude to the TWP members, the Midwives, and all who commented on these “living documents” along the way.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared following potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Lynn Koerbel is the Assistant Director of MBSR Teacher Education and Curricula Development at the Mindfulness Center, Brown University School of Public Health.

The Center takes fee-paying students who are training to become mindfulness teachers. The course was developed with a

length and depth that is in accordance with the standards set out in the article. Prior to submitting this article for publication, these standards have been widely held to be the international gold standard for mindfulness teacher training. Moreover, the standards originally emerged from the inaugural Center for Mindfulness at UMass which have been taken up by all reputable Mindfulness Centres around the world, including at Brown where Lynn works. While it could be viewed that the rigour of the proposed standards makes for a longer course at Brown with higher fees, there are many alternative and briefer trainings increasingly available that give potential students plenty of choice. The evidence base for mindfulness interventions has emerged from courses provided by teachers who have been trained to the standards described in the article.

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Note

- a. Kabat-Zinn has written extensively on the qualities and characteristics of mindfulness, beginning with his seminal work, *Full Catastrophe Living* (1990, 2013). He eschews a specific and fixed definition, citing “operational” as a way to approach and investigate—for oneself—this capacity and practice. MBPs, especially MBSR and MBCT, have used this succinct, operational definition as a starting point, the better to support participants as they begin to work with their own innate attentional capacities and harness the power of their internal resources. It would be important for readers to note that Kabat-Zinn spent a great deal of time thinking and writing on this to ensure the practice and investigation of mindfulness meditation is accessible and approachable to those who may never step inside a meditation hall.

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