

**Reflections of an Adult with Cystic Fibrosis  
on the Personal Significance of Mindfulness  
as Therapeutic Technique and Way of Life**

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## Introduction

I delivered this brief presentation in the context of a session about research regarding emotional health and wellness through the life span within ResearchCon 2021, sponsored by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Bethesda, Maryland USA.<sup>1</sup>

This session reflected the wonderful work of clinicians and researchers who are supporting the CF community's strong priority on emotional and mental health and wellness. It brought together insights from multidisciplinary research and perspectives of members of the CF community that address emotional and mental health challenges and ways to promote resilience throughout the lifespan.

The session was 75 minutes. It began with reflections by Rachel Cravens, doctor of nursing practice and mother of Megan, a 23 year old living with CF. Then psychiatrist Anna Georgiopoulos provided an overview of progress and challenges in CF mental health care. The session moved through the life span with presentations by pediatric pulmonologist Christopher Siracusa on birth through childhood, psychiatrist Anna Georgiopoulos on adolescence, and clinical psychologist CJ Bathgate on adulthood. I offered reflections from the standpoint of an adult with CF who is a social work professor. We concluded with a Question and Answer period.

Here is the reference for this session and its video recording:

- Canda, E. R. (2021, April 15). Moderator and Presenter, *Sweating the Small (and Big) Stuff: Emotional Health Through the Life Span*. ResearchCon 2021, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation [online]. Presenters: Rachel Cravens, Anna Georgiopoulos, Christopher Siracusa, CJ Bathgate, and Edward Canda. Canda presentation: "Reflections of an Adult with CF on the Personal Significance of Mindfulness as Therapeutic Technique and Way of Life. Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww83FRD0e0c>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cff.org/>; <https://cff.swoogo.com/researchcon2021>

## **Reflections on Mindfulness as a Strength in Living with CF**

I would like to offer a few insights about surviving and thriving based on my perspective as a social work professor and an adult living with CF.

My career and personal life have focused on understanding how people can grow through adversity. My research has addressed refugees, health and mental health challenges, and disabilities. I have emphasized the ways people can draw on cultural and spiritual strengths to promote growth and thriving.<sup>2</sup>

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My personal experience highlights the importance of supporting emotional and mental health throughout my 66 years and on to the future.

I grew up with the frustration of misdiagnosed and mistreated illnesses.

I was shocked yet relieved to have clarity, at age 18, when I and my older brother received the CF diagnosis.

I grieved at the loss of my brother 30 years ago.<sup>3</sup>

I faced many challenges managing CF symptoms as a long-time university student and professor, including many international travels.

I have tremendous gratitude for my wife, Hwi-Ja's, support and for care at CF Centers.

Now I am retired,<sup>4</sup> in a new phase of life, with new challenges for health insurance plus unexpected and welcome health improvements due to Trikafta,<sup>5</sup> in the midst of a hopefully declining pandemic.

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<sup>2</sup> See the resources listed at the end of this transcript.

<sup>3</sup> My brother, Tom, died on June 1, 1991 at the age of 41. We shared and discussed many things about living with CF, including dealing with sickness, mortality, and dying and engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation. That was a real gift in my life.

<sup>4</sup> I retired at the end of 2019 after 33 years as a social work professor.

<sup>5</sup> Trikafta is a prescription medication used in treatment for cystic fibrosis, which has recently been released and is benefitting many people with CF: <https://www.trikafta.com/>. I do not have any conflicts of interest regarding this medication or anything else mentioned in this presentation.

Given all that, I'd like to share two insights that stand out for me about promoting wellness that I think are very consistent with the previous presentations.

First, wellness is not just about individual effort. There is a crucial social context.

We need to have proactive public health and social welfare policies and programs to promote a high quality of life for everyone.

Services should be affordable, accessible, equitable, and holistic in order to support surviving and thriving, even with adversity.

Secondly, at the individual level, mindfulness can be a great personal strength for coping and thriving.

Therapeutic mindfulness practices can be helpful to reduce symptoms related to anxiety, depression, and distress, so they are now widely used in health, mental health, social work, and educational settings, including increasingly in CF care as mentioned in previous presentations.

So mindfulness is very important for me in daily life.

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Mindfulness cultivates awareness that is clear, gentle, and non-judgmentally present in each moment, so that I can enjoy and live fully.

It opens a space in my mind between an immediate experience and my reaction to it.

This frees me for how to respond to pain and discomfort.

I can be aware of it, but not trapped in it.

Then I can respond with compassion and skillful care to myself and others.

...

Even more significantly, mindfulness can become a way of life.

Then, every moment, whether stressful, joyful, or indifferent becomes an opportunity for growing insights through the ups, downs, steady times, and doldrums of life.

For example, daily respiratory clearance and antibiotic inhalation treatments can be a real hassle, but they can also be opportunities for sense of gratitude and for self-care.

When I view my medicine and the nebulizer, I view them with appreciation for all the people in the medical community and all other people and beings and the earth itself who made this possible. I receive them as a blessing.

When I do my respiratory clearance and then inhale the nebulized antibiotic, I take this as a time to get centered, and to pay caring attention to myself and to my breath in a meditative way, including if I am coughing.

But I want to be very real about this.

Mindful living does not mean always feeling happy or having a positive attitude.

Yet with mindfulness, even times of pain, worry, fatigue, or discouragement can be loosened, let go, and recovered from more easily.

We can regard ourselves with acceptance, compassion, and care.

Mindful living is about appreciation for the journey of life and experiencing growth and fulfillment along the way.

### **Further Resources**

For those who would like more detail about insights from my research and personal experience regarding growth through adversity and mindfulness, I recommend these resources:

- Canda, E. R. (2020). My sojourn with the strengths perspective: Growth and transformation through crisis, illness, and disability. In A. Mendenhall & M. Carney (Eds.). *Rooted in Strengths: Celebrating the Strengths Perspective in Social Work*. Lawrence, KS: The University of Kansas School of Social Welfare and KU Library/ScholarWorks. E-book chapter:  
[https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/30272/24\\_Rooted%20in%20Strengths\\_revisedMay2020.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y](https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/30272/24_Rooted%20in%20Strengths_revisedMay2020.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y).
- Canda, E. R. (2019, November 14). *A foundation of strengths: Growth & transformation through crisis, illness, and disability*. Lecture video produced by The University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, Lawrence, KS. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-Tj0b3euO0>

- Canda, E. R. (February 18, 2021). *Culturally and ethically appropriate use of Buddhist derived mindfulness practices in professional social work*. North America Session on Indigenous Social Work Education and Practice, 5<sup>th</sup> International Academic Forum 2021 (online), Asian Research Institute for International Social Work, Shukutoku University, Japan. Also, moderator for this session with Dean Michael Yellow Bird of University of Manitoba Faculty of Social Work (on neurodecolonization) and Prof. Nicole Ives, McGill University School of Social Work (on developing Indigenous social work education programs), Canada. Video available at: <https://youtu.be/LcngpMMF9i0>. Canda presentation is 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Canda, E. R., & Warren, S. (2013). Mindfulness. In C. Franklin et al. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social work* (e-reference edition). NY: Oxford University Press.