

Mindful Minute

Introducing mindfulness to the NICU

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BACKGROUND

There has been an increasing focus on staff wellbeing in recent years with emphasis on safeguarding the health and mental wellbeing of our workforce. The NHS workforce face many challenges and around 40% of respondents in the 2023 NHS Staff survey reported feeling unwell as a result of work-related stress in the preceding 12 months. Staff within the PICU or NICU setting have been found to be at high risk of burnout. There is increasing evidence that mindfulness-based activities can have positive impact in the workplace with studies reporting increased collaboration, improved decision making and a more productive and compassionate workplace.

AIMS

This project aimed to introduce short mindfulness exercises during morning handovers in the neonatal unit. The 1-2 minute activities were conducted 2-3 times a week over five weeks in July and August 2024. The impact was assessed through pre- and post-activity questionnaires, with overall programme evaluation conducted at the end.

METHODS

Prior to the sessions, a leaflet explained the project. Five mindfulness activities were planned, supported by short video resources:

- Week 1: Mindful Eating
- Week 2: Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Week 3: Mini Meditation
- Week 4: Box Breathing
- Week 5: Desk Yoga

Sessions began at 8:15 before handover. A session leader introduced the activity, followed by a brief video-guided exercise. Participants completed anonymous pre- and post-activity surveys, answering questions on focus, calmness, handover readiness, and preparedness for the shift ahead (or leaving the shift behind). Responses were rated on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert scale, with higher scores indicating more favourable responses. Post-activity surveys included a free-text option for comments.

Mindful Minute - WEEK 1 - Pre-exercise

Mindful Eating

I feel focused *

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

I feel calm *

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

I feel ready to receive (or give) handover information *

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

I feel prepared to start the shift ahead (DAY TEAM) or to leave the shift behind (NIGHT TEAM) *

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Figure 1: Example Questionnaire with Likert Scale

Overall Evaluation - Acceptability Survey Results

After the 5-week programme, staff were sent an overall evaluation questionnaire via email. Questions asked were again rated on a Likert Scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) and again, a higher score was favourable.

Questionnaire included 6 questions as well as a free text box asking for any other comments. There were 13 respondents in total and results are summarised below.

Limitations

This project mostly captured medical staff and Advanced Nurse Practitioners who attend the morning handover. For this to be inclusive, there needs to be scope to extend this to allied health professionals including the nursing team. Feedback included preference of longer sessions but there are limitations to facilitating this without infringing on handover time.

Results

Average scores for the pre- and post-exercise surveys were calculated, with a total average of 16.8 participants (pre) and 14.8 (post) per session. All surveys showed an increase in scores after the activities (see Figure 2). Weeks 4 (Box Breathing) and 5 (Desk Yoga) had the highest impact, though initial scores were lower, possibly due to a busier workload.

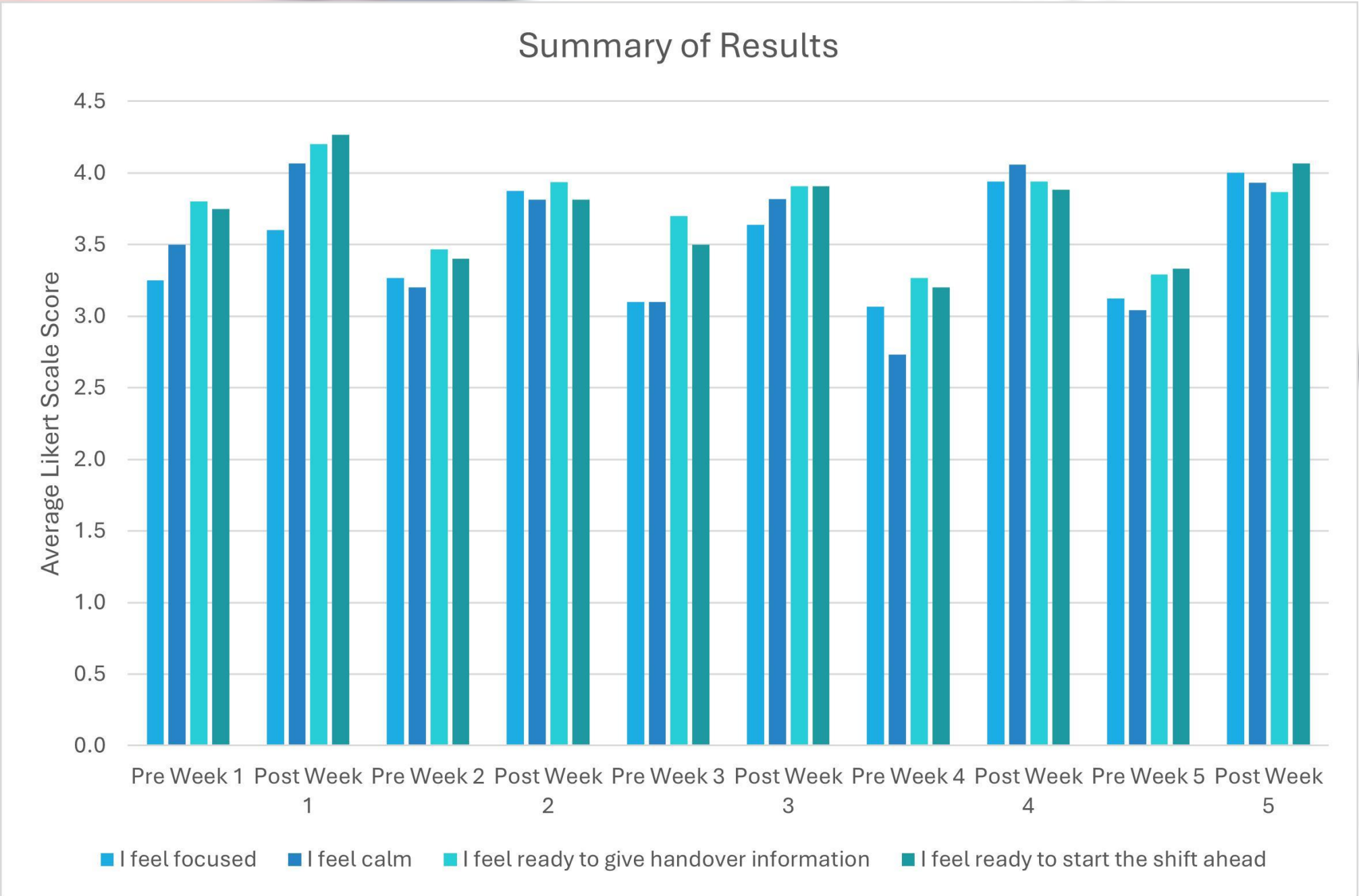


Figure 2: Average Likert Scale Scores pre and post across all activities

Average Likert Scale Score



Figure 3: Average Likert Scale for overall evaluation

Conclusion

The mindfulness activities were well received and increased staff feelings of calm and focus. Feedback suggested that longer activities would be preferred, though this could conflict with handover time. This pilot project demonstrated the potential for mindfulness exercises in intensive care settings and could inform future staff wellbeing programmes in the Neonatal Unit and beyond.

References:

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