

The Center for

Mind-Body Medicine[®]

Science. Training. Community. Outreach.

5225 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, NW, SUITE 414 • WASHINGTON, DC 20015
TEL. (202) 966-7338 • FAX (202) 966-2589 • center@cmbm.org • www.cmbm.org

**Making Mind-Body Medicine Central to Mental Health in Post-War Kosovo
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**James S. Gordon, M.D.
Founder and Director**

In 1998 Dr. Susan Lord and I first crossed into Kosovo in the middle of the war. We were committed to helping health, mental health, and other community leaders to deal with the psychological toll that massacres, rapes, and the mass destruction of homes was taking. There was no mental health system in place, and, indeed, very little help of any kind for the vast majority of the poor, rural population. We spent time in the hills with women and children driven out of their homes; began to train doctors, nurses and volunteers of the Mother Theresa Society; and presented workshops to peacekeepers from around the world, to help them deal with tragedies they were unable to prevent and forced to witness.

Six years later our work - which combines psychological self-care, mind-body approaches and group support - has become the cornerstone of Kosovo's new nation-wide community mental health centers (CMHC) system. We have trained an eleven-person indigenous Kosovo faculty - the nation's most creative, gifted and respected psychiatrists and psychologists. And they, with our guidance and consultation, are now training all those who work in the community mental health system.

During the past month I and several of my colleagues - Bob Buckley, LICSW, our Clinical Supervisor; Julie Staples, PhD, our Research Director; and Tina Linden, who has managed and helped guide the Kosovo project from the beginning - have worked intensively with our Kosovo colleagues. We consulted with them as they led an Advanced Training for 60 leading mental health professionals. They shared with us the ways they are using our work in their daily lives and with their families, as well as in their schools and CMHC's.

When the psychiatrists who lead the seven CMHC's first met us and our Kosovo faculty, a number of them were skeptical. They were committed to relying mainly on pharmaceutical treatment. Mind-body approaches were altogether unfamiliar to them. To our great joy, they have embraced our work and are guiding their professional staff in its implementation. Staff meetings at CMHC's often begin with a (nondenominational) meditation. Self-care - including guided imagery, biofeedback, exercise and meditation - is used preferentially before medication. CMHC nurses, who were long regarded as undereducated, are discovering an untapped ability to guide and help others.

The CMHC's, using our approach, are now successfully reaching thousands of people who would never have sought out or accepted mental health services: Women whose husbands were killed; men and women returning from incarceration in Serbia; former KLA soldiers; abused children and young people with drug and alcohol problems; women and children waiting forlornly for word about husbands and fathers who have been missing for years.

The research we've done with teachers in the Suhareka region is continuing. The first paper on this work, with 139 high school students, recently appeared in *The Journal of Traumatic Stress*, the leading publication in the field. It showed the striking power of our approach to reduce posttraumatic stress disorder (nightmares, flashbacks, high levels of anxiety, isolation from and fear of others) in teenagers - from 85% to 35% over the course of 6 weeks. Now we're analyzing data on 250 more students. And we've laid the groundwork for a randomized controlled trial of our work with teenagers with PTSD - the first time ever that a mind-body approach for PTSD will have been studied in this rigorous way.

Our approach is not only powerfully effective, but also sustainable. It is now being integrated into the education of the next generation of mental health professionals. There are 50 first-year medical students who have asked to participate in mind-body skills groups. Psychiatric residents are learning these techniques, as is the first graduating class of young psychologists. Our faculty, with supervisory and financial support from us, are in turn providing regular ongoing supervision and consultation to all CMHC's.

On this last trip, Tina Linden and I had the opportunity to meet with the Permanent Secretary of Kosovo's Ministry of Health, with the Minister himself, with Kosovo's Prime Minister, Bajram Rexhepi, and with the U.S. Chief of Mission (Ambassador) Philip Goldberg. The Ministry of Health told us that our program was the first in all of Kosovo to be granted continuing education credit for physicians, psychologists, social workers and nurses - and they gave us, as well, a grant (the first ever awarded to a foreign professional group) for our recent Advanced Training. Ambassador Goldberg himself opened the training. He presented an informed and warm appreciation of our work and of the important and powerful role psychological healing can have in peacemaking. Prime Minister Rexhepi, who is also a surgeon, told us that psychological trauma is one of the most important health needs in post-war Kosovo and that our work, in particular, is of singular importance to the people of Kosovo.

We are now bringing the model we developed in Kosovo, about which and from which we are learning so much, to Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. In the years ahead we hope to be able to share this empowering, life changing, peace bringing work with people all over the world.

During this last trip to Kosovo I felt honored, proud, and just plain delighted, to see the ways our work has affected people - personally as well as professionally; to experience the absolutely first-rate training that our Kosovo faculty is doing; to observe the way mind-body medicine is coming to shape an entire nation's approach to health care; and to feel that we are making a powerful contribution to peace and reconciliation.

I thought of all of you, too, while I was in Kosovo. Your loving interest, your commitment and your support have made this work possible - I am deeply grateful, as are the people of Kosovo.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James S. Gordon', written in a cursive style.

James S. Gordon, M.D.