

The Healing Power of Compassion: Insights Emerging from the Convergence of Science and Spirituality

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by

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Outline

- 1. Potential Benefits of Compassion Training**
- 2. What is Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT)**
- 3. How is it “cognitively-based”?**
- 4. The CBCT Protocol**
- 5. Essential ingredients of CBCT**
- 6. On-going studies employing CBCT**

“Compassion and love are not mere luxuries. As the source both of inner and external peace, they are fundamental to the continued survival of our species. On the one hand, they constitute non-violence in action. On the other hand, they are the source of all spiritual qualities: of forgiveness, tolerance, and all the virtues. Moreover, they are the very thing that gives meaning to our activities and makes them constructive. There is nothing amazing about being rich. Only when the individual has a warm heart do these attributes become worthwhile”.

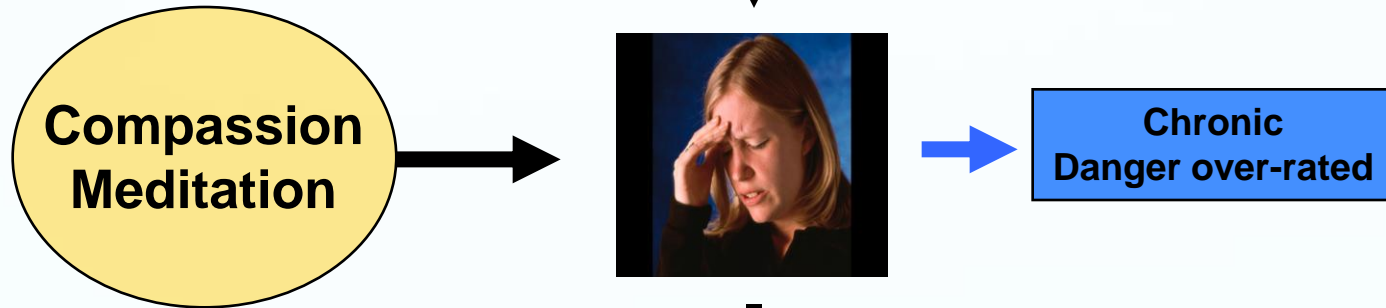
H.H. the Dalai Lama

“Today in the first decade of the 21st century, science and spirituality have the potential to be closer than ever, and to embark upon a collaborative endeavor that has far-reaching potential to help humanity meet the challenges before us.”

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Stress, Disease, and Depression

STRESS = Our Troubles



Stress System + Inflammation

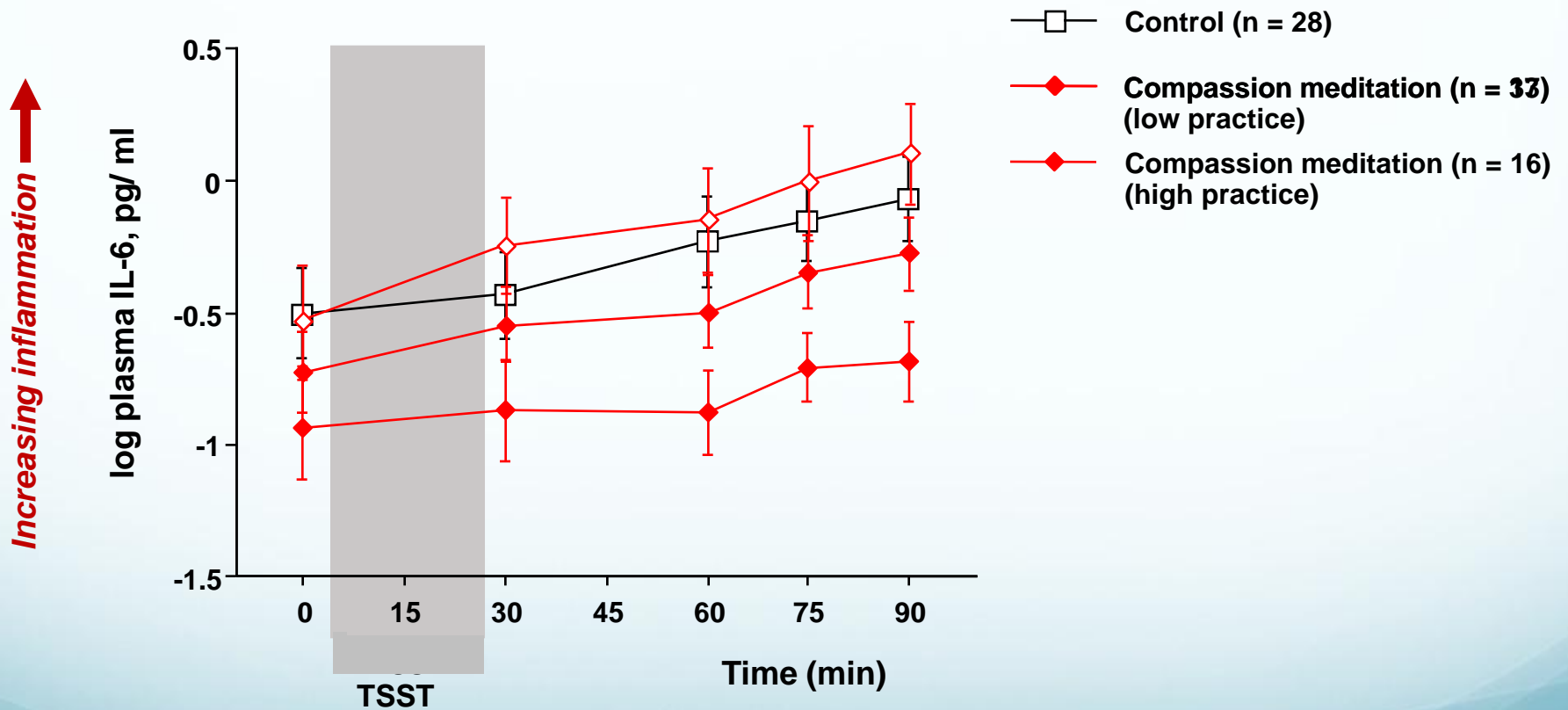
Cost to Body and Brain

Depression

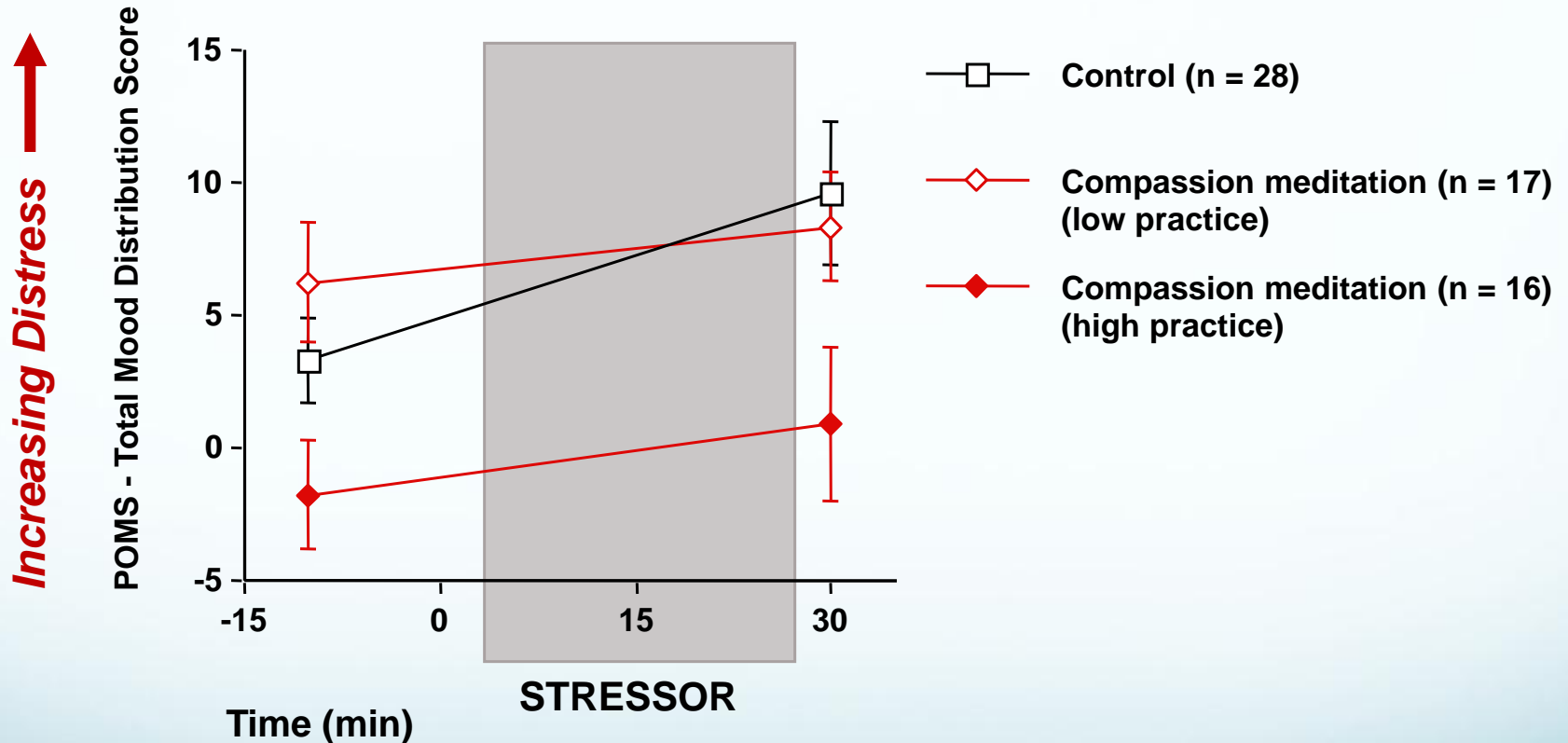
Heart Disease
Diabetes
Dementia
Cancer



Effect of Meditation Practice on IL-6 Responses to the TSST when Compared to Control Subjects

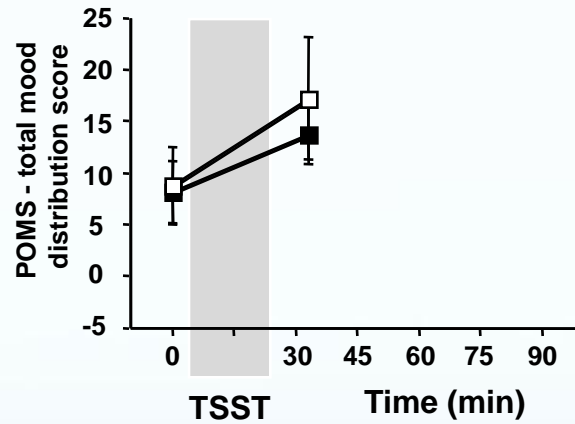


Effect of Meditation Practice on Distress Responses to the TSST when Compared to Control Subjects

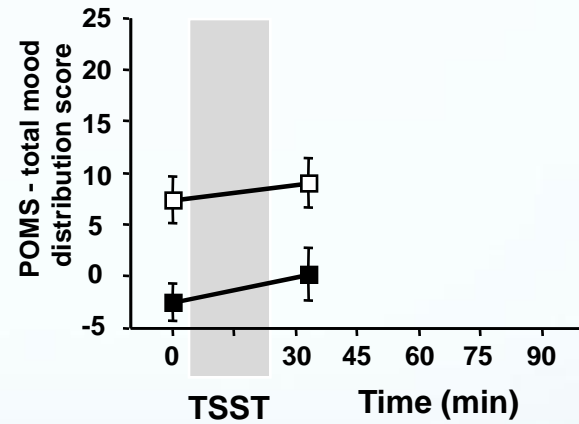


**POMS
Total
Distress**

**TSST prior to
meditation training**

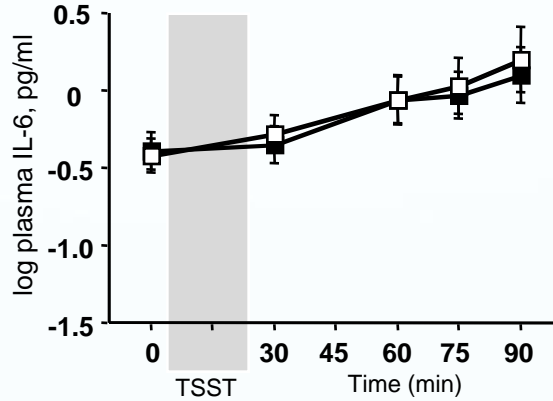


**TSST after
meditation training**

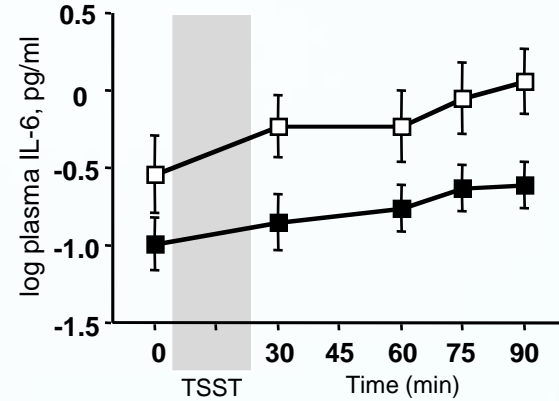


IL-6

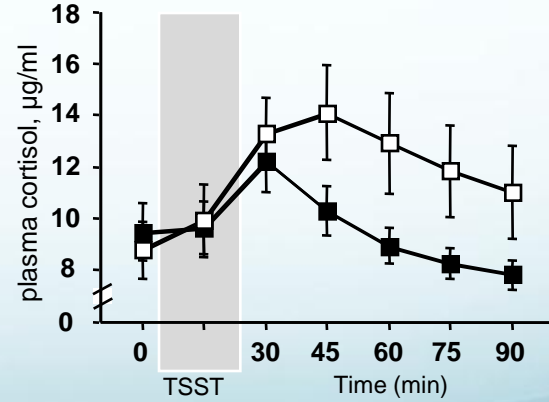
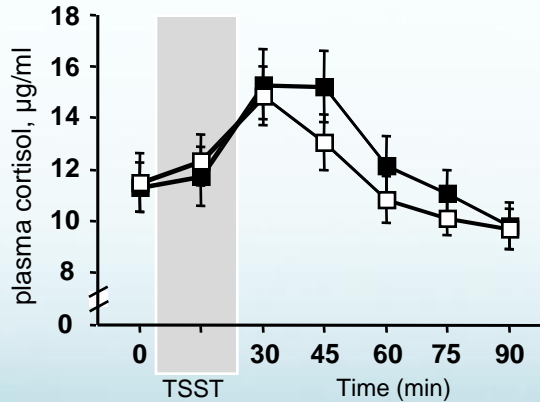
TSST prior to meditation training



TSST after meditation training



Cortisol



—□— low practice
—■— high practice

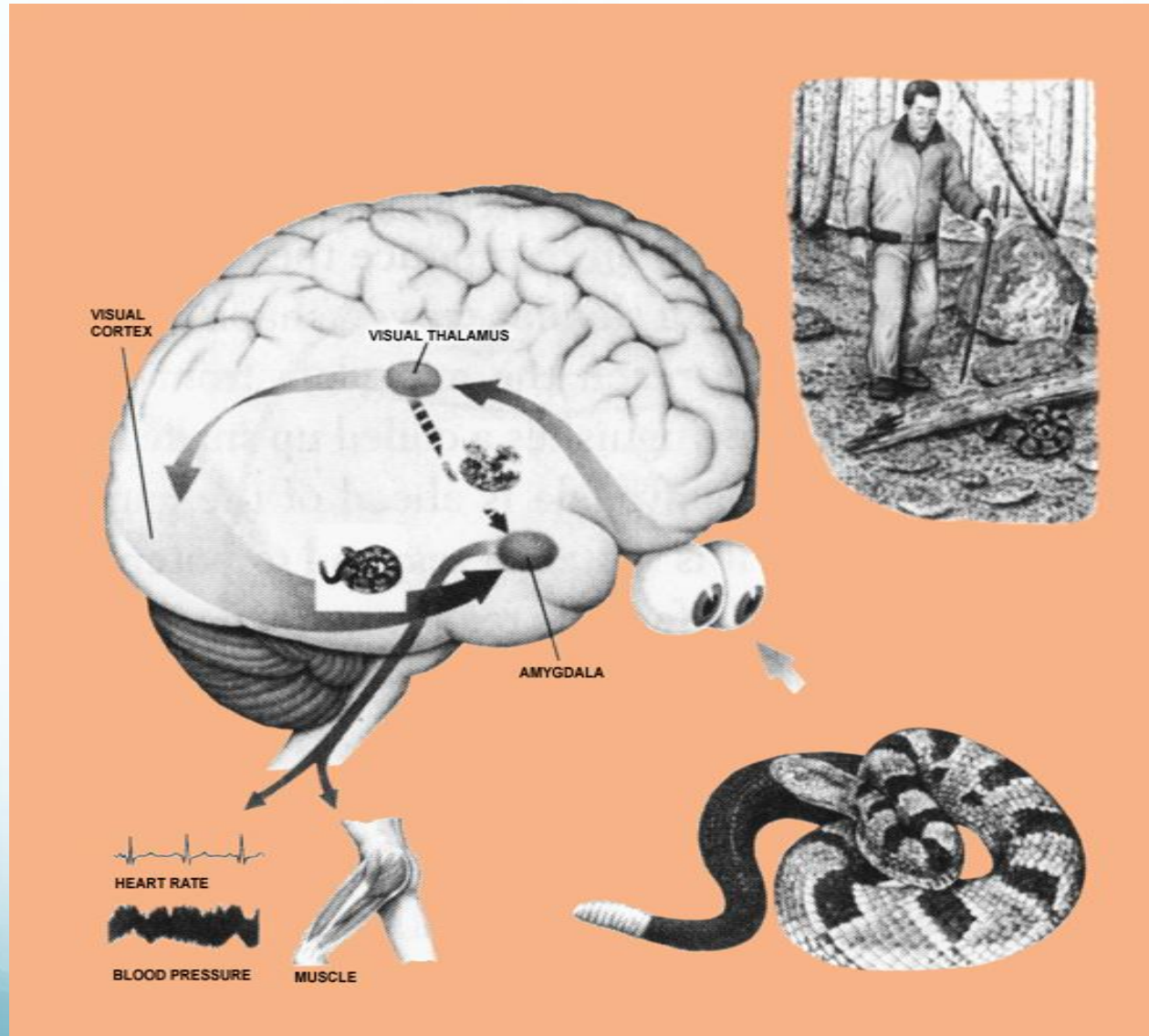
What is Cognitively-Based Compassion Training?

- **CBCT is drawn from the *lojong* (training the mind) and *lam rim* (stages of the path) traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, but rendered into secular form.**
- **Of the two styles of meditation presented in these traditions, *che-gom* (analytical, or cognitively-based meditation) and *jog-gom* (focused meditation), CBCT primarily employs the former.**

How is it “cognitively-based”?

- **CBCT recognizes a biologically-given potential for compassion in all of us, but employs deliberate training to expand this capacity beyond the limits of in-group/out-group bias.**
- **CBCT recognizes also the centrality of one’s perspectives in shaping emotional and behavioral responses.**
- **By cognitively fine-tuning our understanding to better accord with reality, we can alter our affective and behavioral responses.**
- **This new understanding must become deeply engrained through immersive training.**

Defusing Emotional Hijacking: A Top-Down Approach



Joseph LeDoux
The Emotional Brain

The CBCT Protocol

- **A six-week version of the protocol for compassion meditation was first developed in 2005 for the study “Compassion Meditation as a Strategy for Reducing Depressive Symptoms in College Freshmen.” This study was conducted over five semesters.**
- **In 2010 this was expanded to an eight-week protocol for the CALM (Compassion and Attention Longitudinal Meditation) study with an adult population. This study will continue over the next five years.**

The CBCT Protocol

- 1. Developing Attentional Stability**
- 2. Cultivating Insight into the Nature of Mental Experience and Cultivating Self-Compassion**
- 3. Developing Impartiality**
- 4. Developing Appreciation and Gratitude for Others**
- 5. Developing Affection and Empathy**
- 6. Realizing Wishing, Aspiring and Engaged Compassion for Others**

Essential Ingredients of CBCT

1. Attentional Stability

- Mindfulness of the breath
- Mindfulness and introspective vigilance

2. Self-Compassion

- Coming to an understanding of the relationship between one's own emotions and actions, and one's experience of suffering and happiness
- Gaining the insight that the conditions leading to suffering can be transformed
- Gaining confidence in one's ability to transform them
- Resolving to transform them

Essential Ingredients of CBCT

3. Developing Impartiality

- Dismantling bias based on the categories of friend, stranger and enemy
- Recognizing the equality of all based on their common aspiration for happiness and to avoid suffering
- Recognizing the shortsightedness of basing one's attitude on the categories of friend, stranger and enemy

4. Developing a Sense of Endearment towards Others

- Cultivating gratitude by reflecting on the kindness of others
- Reflecting on how interdependent we are with others

“ A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive”.

Albert Einstein

“As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being, once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. If indeed such men are separated from him by great differences in appearance or habits, experience, unfortunately, shows us how long it is before we look at them as our fellow creatures. Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is, humanity to lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions. This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings.”

Charles Darwin

On-going studies employing CBCT

- **The Compassion and Attention Longitudinal (CALM) study:**

- Based on initial study of Emory undergraduates
- Five-year, NIH-funded study underway evaluating CBCT in a healthy adult population

- **The Paideia School CBCT Study:**

- Pilot program for children 5-8 yrs of age offered in 2009
- Extended study to be conducted in early 2011 in collaboration with the Paideia School

- **A Study of Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) to Enhance Health and Well-Being in Adolescents in Foster Care in Metropolitan Atlanta:**

- Pilot program offered in 2009.
- Study with two cohorts conducted in 2010 in collaboration with Georgia State Department of Human Resources

- **Grady CAMP (Grady Compassion and Meditation Project):**

- 6-week program for African-American men and women who have made a suicide attempt. First cohort in summer 2010; second to begin soon.

- **Pilot Study of CBCT for Trauma in Kosovo:**

- Exploration of a meditation-based intervention as preventive/treatment for stress and PTSD
- Pilot study conducted in May, 2010

- Randomized trial planned for 2011 in collaboration with CDC International Emergency and Refugee Health Branch; the Antares Foundation (the Netherlands); and the Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT).