



The Spiritual Dimension in Aging®

Linda J. Keilman, DNP, GNP-BC
Geriatric Education Center of Michigan
Michigan State University, College of Nursing

Objectives:

1. Understand the *difference* between religion and spirituality.
2. Define the major concepts integral to the spiritual dimension.
3. List the spiritual needs.
4. Describe therapeutic interventions that can be effectively utilized to care for the spiritual dimension of older adults.

- Religion does not equal spirituality
- Spirituality does not equal religion
- Do not confuse religion with spirituality or spirituality with religion



Religion:

- Believing
- Beliefs, practices, rituals, symbols, doctrines, traditions
- Organized system
- Sacred
- Commitment or devotion to faith or observance



- “A set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature & purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional & ritual observances; often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs”

(<http://dictionary.reference.com>)

- “The service & worship of God or the supernatural; commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance”

(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>)

Research Findings:

- Positive relationship between religion & physical health
- 9 out of 10 older adults rate religion as important in their lives
- Religion may become more important over time
- People do not necessarily become more religious as they age
- Older adults less able to access religious resources when they may need it most



Spirituality

Definitions:

- “An aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek & express meaning & purpose & the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature & to the significant or sacred” (Puchalski & Ferrell, 2010, p. 5)
- “A broad concept that goes beyond religious or cultural boundaries” (Delgado, 2005, p. 157)

- Feeling
- Emotionally directed
- Personal search for meaning & purpose
- Relationship to self, others, nature, world, Higher Power
- Quest for trying to understand the answers to life’s ultimate questions



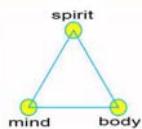
Descriptors:

- Sense of personhood
- Supreme experience
- Literal “breath of life”
- Humanity’s single unifying & transcendent dimension
- Human phenomenon that helps create meaning in the world
- Motivating force



Concepts:

- Healing
- Wholeness
- Social justice
- Personal growth
- Interpersonal relationships
- Meaning & purpose to life
- Transcendent relationship with a Higher Power or Being



- Connectedness
- Feelings or behaviors arising from:
 - Love
 - Hope
 - Trust
 - Creativity
 - Faith
- Means of forgiveness

*faith love
hope*



Spiritual Needs

- Conscious or unconscious strivings that arise from the influence of the human spirit on the biopsychosocial natures
- Stem from a recognition that human life is finite & that there is a higher purpose to which people are called *(Koenig, 1994)*

- A need for meaning, purpose & hope
- A need to transcend circumstances
- A need for support in dealing with loss
- A need for continuity
- A need for validation & support of religious behaviors
- A need to engage in religious behaviors
- A need for personal dignity & sense of worthiness

- A need for unconditional love
- A need to express anger & doubt
- A need to feel that _____ (*Higher Being, God, the Ultimate, etc*) is on their side
- A need to love & serve others
- A need to be thankful 
- A need to forgive & be forgiven
- A need to prepare for death & dying

- The need to find hope in the face of illness
- Receive & give love 
- Find meaning & purpose in life to make sense of senselessness



Aging & Spirituality



- Aging is a spiritual journey
- Coping mechanism
- Desire to give back to others
- Seeking:
 - Meaning
 - An eternal life
 - Happiness
 - Guidance for living life
 - Way to overcome discomfort or distress



- Spirituality increases with aging
- As we age, life forces us to confront existential dilemmas
 - Want to make sense of losses
 - Find strength
- Treasure honesty & authenticity
- Directly confront the fragility of life



Spiritual Distress



Defining Characteristics:

- Alterations in behavior/mood
 - Anger
 - Crying
 - Withdrawal
 - Preoccupation
 - Anxiety
 - Hostility
 - Apathy



- Expresses concern with meaning of life/death
- Verbalizes inner conflict about beliefs
- Expresses anger toward deity
- Questions meaning of own existence
- Use of gallows humor
- Unable to participate in daily activities
- Description of sleep disturbances

- Feels a sense of emptiness
- Loss of direction
- Seeks spiritual help
- Deep questioning
- Expressing regrets & remorse
- Expressed emotions & disturbing thoughts

“I would be better off dead”

“I’m a burden to my family”

- Alteration in appearance
 - Clothing
 - Hair
 - Hygiene
- Withdrawal
- Change in appetite
- Weight loss
- Urinary incontinence
- Cognitive decline
- Suicidal ideation



- Lack of direction
- Lack of community
- Distorted & dysfunctional relationships
- Unfinished business
- Pain of the soul; the spirit
- Voiceless
- Disharmony



- Hopelessness
- Powerlessness
- Uselessness
- Abandonment
- S u f f e r i n g



Dis-Spiriting Practices

- Treating the individual as an object or as invisible
- Talking “over & around”
- Meeting the individual with obvious distraction, preoccupation & annoyance
- Blaming the individual for not behaving cheerfully or well
- Not listening



- Making the individual wait long periods for you & then rushing them when you are present
- Failing to consult the individual or urge their participation in their daily care or plan for the day
- Blaming the individual for their problems or pain



- Treating a person very patronizingly
(parent to child)
- Invalidation – failing to acknowledge the subjective reality of an individual's experience & feelings
- Outpacing – providing information, choices, options, education at a fast pace where the individual cannot assimilate
- Lacking cultural or ethnic awareness



Assessing the Spiritual Dimension

- How do you get through difficult times?
- What is important to you in your life?
- What are your life goals & have you met them?
- Tell me something from your life that has particular meaning for/to you.
- What sparks meaning in your life?

- What are your sources of hope, strength, comfort & peace?
- Are you part of a religious or spiritual community?
- What spiritual practices do you find most helpful to you personally?
- Are there are specific practices or restrictions I need to know about in providing you care?

Screening Tools



FICA

Puchalski, C.M., & Romer, A.L. (2000). Taking a spiritual history allows clinicians to understand patients more fully. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 3(1), 129 – 137.

- **F Faith, belief, meaning**
 - Do you have spiritual beliefs that help you cope with stress?
- **I Importance & influence**
 - What importance does your faith or belief have in your life?
- **C Community**
 - Are you part of a spiritual or religious community?
- **A Address/Action in care**
 - How should the healthcare provider address these issues in your healthcare?

HOPE

Questions

Anandarajah, G. & Hight, E. (2001). Spirituality and medical practice: Using the HOPE questions as a practical tool for spiritual assessment. *American Family Physician*, 63(1), 81–89.

- **H**
 - Sources of hope, meaning, comfort, strength, love, peace & connection
- **O**
 - Organized religion
- **P**
 - Personal spirituality practices
- **E**
 - Effects of medical (health) care on end-of-life decisions

FACT

LaRocca-Pitts, M. (2008). A spiritual history tool: FACT. Retrieved from <http://www.professionalchaplains.org/uploadedFiles/pdf/FACT%20Spiritual%20History%20Larocca%20Pitts.pdf>

- **F – Faith or Beliefs**
- **A – Availability, Accessibility, Applicability**
- **C – Coping or Comfort**
- **T – Treatment Plan**

FAITH

King, D. E. (2002). Spirituality and medicine. In M.B. Mengel, W.L. Holleman, & S.A. Fields (Eds.). *Fundamentals of clinical practice: A textbook on the patient, doctor, and society* (pp. 651-669). New York, NY: Plenum Publishers.

- **F – Do you have a Faith or religion that is important to you?**
- **A – How do your beliefs Apply to your health?**
- **I – Are you Involved in a church or faith community?**
- **T – How do your spiritual views affect your views about Treatment?**
- **H – How can I Help you with any spiritual concerns?**

Interventions for Enhancing the Spiritual Dimension



- Establish a trusting, supportive, therapeutic relationship
- Provide & facilitate a supportive environment
- Respond sensitively to the person's beliefs & concerns
- Integrate spirituality into the Quality Improvement (QI) plan
- Listen actively & intentionally



- Show respect for all persons
- Be humanistic, compassionate & caring
- Recognize the individual as teacher 
- Thinking about how to plan & best present information prior to a meeting
- Avoid becoming cynical
- Continually search for meaning in YOUR life & work

- Therapeutic silence
- Positive communication
 - Reflection
 - Summarizing
- Give encouragement (*verbal or non-*)
- Demonstrate genuine respect 
- Intentionally convey caring & compassion
- Express empathy
- Use appropriate language & words

- Therapies – music, art, plant, pet, dance
- Touch
- Protecting space & privacy
- Natural, unplanned humor
- Providing intuitive support
- *Allow the person to tell their story*
- Maintain competence
- Intervene when appropriate to your level of knowledge, skill & comfort
 - Appropriate referral



- **Reframing**
 - Seeing things from a different perspective
 - Draws upon individuals belief system & religious tradition
- **Diversion or Refocusing**
- **Life-affirming activities**
- **Reading**
 - Poetry
 - Children's books
 - Classic books



- **Therapeutic use of SELF**
- **Presence or Being With**
- **Instilling hope**
 - Adaptive coping mechanism
 - Realistic assessment of condition
 - Determination to endure
- **Prayer**
- **Meditation**



- **“Strive to achieve personal awareness & an understanding of personal beliefs, values & attitudes”** (Wright, Hellman, & Ziegelstein, 2005)
- **Mindfulness**
- **Empathic presence**
 - Interpersonal connectedness
 - Lightheartedness
 - Optimize personal strengths



- Focus on short term, achievable goals
- Offer hope of
 - Comfort
 - Decreasing pain & other symptoms
 - Strength for the family
 - Being well remembered
- Name the qualities you see in the person &/or their family members (*wisdom, humor, knowledge, life experience, grace, stewardship, communication, hospitality, etc.*)



Path to a More Spiritual Life



- Every day reflect on the day's events
 - What experiences gave you life & joy?
 - What experiences drained you?
- Maintain positive relationships & find solace & peace in a community
 - Necessary for growth, survival & gaining spiritual meaning



- Meditate or just stop what you are doing every day for at least 15 minutes
 - Helps to develop Self-Awareness
 - Reflection on personal beliefs/values
- Ask for time
 - To reflect
 - To search for meaning
- Take time
 - For self
 - For others



- Free your heart from hatred
- Free your mind from worries
- Live simply
- Give more
- Expect less
- Respect the environment
- Love all living things



*Thank
You*

Linda J. Keilman, DNP, GNP-BC

College of Nursing @ Michigan State University

1355 Bogue Street, A126 Life Sciences Building

517-355-3365

keilman@msu.edu
