

# Finding Spiritual Support

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# Objectives

- To explore similarities and differences of religion and spirituality
- To identify spiritual concerns
- To examine the importance of fulfilling spiritual needs.
- To identify helpful methods of finding spiritual support

# Insights to Spiritual Distress

A real medicine can only exist  
when it penetrates into a knowledge  
which embraces the human being  
in respect  
to body, soul and spirit.

*Rudolf Steiner*

# Spiritual Pain

- A search for meaning and purpose and a sense of connection rather than a reflection of religious practices and beliefs.
- Individuals need a strong sense of meaning making and connection with life. When such a connection is threatened by a break with the normal or expected relationships, it is experienced as spiritual pain, creating a void that challenges the individual's ability to make meaning from his or her life.

# Alienation from God

- Loss of faith
- Loss of trust
- Despair, hopelessness
- Dark night of the Soul
- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

# Alienation from Others

- Becoming emotional strangers to one another
- The spiritual bond that can so often transcend physical space is broken and dissolved.
- Due to a shift in consciousness, the spiritual path of someone in relationship changes

# Religion and Spirituality

- Religion – the communal experience of one's internal beliefs characterized by creeds and dogmas of a particular faith.
- Spirituality – One's personal and intimate relationship with the transcendent; a connection to a Higher Power and/or to the Divine within one's everyday activities and personal relationships

# Spirituality

- Attributes
  - Meaning
  - Value
  - Transcendence
  - Connecting
  - Becoming

Matsoff and Mickley, Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing



# Spirituality

- Meaning
  - “The ontological significance of life; making sense of life situations; deriving purpose in existence.”

Martsoff and Mickley, Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing

# Spirituality

- Value
  - “Beliefs and standards that are cherished; having to do with truth, beauty, worth of a thought, object or behavior; often discussed and ‘ultimate values’.”

Martsoff and Mickley, *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing*

# Spirituality

- Transcendence
  - “Experience and appreciation of a dimension beyond the self; expanding self-boundaries.”

Martsoff and Mickley, *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing*

# Spirituality

- Connecting
  - “Relationships with self, others, God/Higher Power, and the environment.”

Martsoff and Markley, Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing

# Spirituality

- Becoming
  - “An unfolding of life that demands reflection and experience; includes a sense of who one is and how one knows, among other things.”

Martsoff and Markley, *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing*

# Spiritual Distress

- Humans innately search for meaning.
- We all have a need to connect to the transcendent but the pathways are multiple and not exclusively “religious”.
- Clinical studies indicate spiritual distress can manifest as depression.

# Research

- The importance of spirituality in coping with a terminal illness is becoming increasingly recognized.
- Research in recent years has been assessing the relation between spiritual well-being, depression, and end-of-life despair in terminally-ill cancer patients.
- Spiritual well-being offers some protection against end-of-life despair in those for whom death is imminent. Findings have important implications for palliative care practice.
- Controlled research assessing the effect of spirituality-based interventions is needed to establish what methods can help engender a sense of peace and meaning.

[McClain CS](#), [Rosenfeld B](#), [Breitbart W](#). *Lancet*, 2003, May 10; 361 (9369): 1603-7.

# Spiritual Distress

- Needs of the dying
  - Sense of completion of worldly affairs
  - Sense of completion in relationships
  - Sense of meaning about one's life
  - Experience love of self
  - Experience the love of others

Ira Byock, *Dying Well*, 1997



# Spiritual Concerns of the Dying

- Multiple losses
- Suffering
- Euthanasia
- Self judgment
- Unresolved grief
- Guilt
- Crisis of faith
  - Anger at God
  - Loss of beliefs
  - Oppressive beliefs
- Life review
- Sense of self worth
- Forgiveness

# Religion and Spirituality

- Religion
  - The practices, beliefs, and attitudes that an individual has towards a higher power or supernatural force according to a set of institutional or congregational codes or traditions
  - May represent a significant means of expressing a person's spirituality

# Religion and Spirituality

- Spirituality
  - An individual's unique relationship and understanding of a higher power or supernatural force in the universe
  - The way people find meaning, hope, comfort, and inner peace
  - The capacity to possess values, beliefs, and convictions that give meaning and purpose to life.

# Spiritual Concerns of the Patient

- Multiple Losses
  - Vitality
  - Physical capabilities
  - Role changes
  - Relationships
  - Finances
- Suffering
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Emotional/Psychosocial
  - Spiritual

# The Patient as a Person

- Maintaining a purpose in life is critical
- The patient has a right to information.
- How does the patient construct meaning?
- What is important to them? Ask the patient:
  - What do you want now?
  - From whom do you want it?
  - When do you want it?
- People need to do things their own way.
- Give patients a sense of being in charge.

# End of Life Tasks

- Life Review
- Sense of completion with worldly affairs and community relationships
- Sense of meaning about one's life
- Experience love of self and love of others
- Sense of completion in relationships with loved ones
- Acceptance of the finality of life
- Sense of new self beyond personal loss
- Letting go" into the transcendent, to the unknown

# 5 Most Important Things

- There are 5 important relationship communications at the end of life:
  - “I love you.”
  - “I forgive you.”
  - “Please forgive me.”
  - “I’m sorry.”
  - “Goodbye.”

Ira Byock MD, ***Dying Well***, 1997.

# Cultivating an Effective Presence

- Slow down
- Develop the capacity for awareness and attention
- Respect your experience as well as that of the other
- Practice compassionate listening.
- Withhold negative judgments as well as opinions



# Spiritual Support

## Personal Spiritual Practices

- Prayer
- Inspirational readings
- Meditation
- Yoga, Tai Chi
- Nature
- Journaling
- Art

International Symposium on Malignant Mesothelioma 2011 -- [curemeso.org](http://curemeso.org)

# Spiritual Support

Connecting with a Spiritual Community

- ***Reasons to seek spiritual support***
  - ***Desire to experience God's love***
  - ***Need for prayer***
  - ***Support for self and family members***
  - ***Find inner peace***
  - ***Assurance***

# Spiritual Support

## Connecting with a Spiritual Community

- Talk with family or friends
- Research websites of local spiritual communities
- Contact the pastor/community leader
- Attend services
- Join support groups