Development of a Model for Spiritual Assessment and Intervention

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ABSTRACT: A multidisciplinary model for making spiritual assessments and interventions is described. The practitioner bases these assessments and interventions upon knowledge gained from philosophy, theology, physiology, psychology, and sociology. Specific assessments are made in the areas of spiritual development and seven practical dimensions of spiritual care. The patient's life experiences, events, and questions shape the nature of spiritual care as the practitioner works toward assisting the patient to maintain or expand the level of spiritual functioning.

Introduction

While the spiritual dimension of care has been recognized as being important by some health care professionals, many professionals still view this dimension as "less than" scientific, and therefore less important when compared to the physiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions of persons. A review of literature suggests that our empirical knowledge about the spiritual dimension of care remains limited, and much that has been written reflects intuitively and emotionally based knowledge. Our understanding of the spiritual dimension can be classified as being at the first level of theory development, where the focus of activity is on naming concepts, classifying and categorizing them, and creating conceptual unities.¹

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As health care professionals, our conceptualization of spiritual care is generally shaped by our personal spiritual beliefs and professional frame of reference. This paper proposes a multidisciplinary approach that may be taken in naming concepts of spiritual care, and classifying and categorizing them in relationship with each other. (Figure 1) We define the concept “spiritual dimension,” discuss spiritual care as an applied science, and identify the spiritual dimension as a developmentally based phenomenon. Out of our theoretically based understanding, seven categories evolve which provide a practical understanding of the spiritual dimension. Life experiences, events, and questions are shaped by one’s understanding of the spiritual dimension, the stages of spiritual development, and the practical experiences associated with the spiritual dimension. These combined experiences affect life options and outcomes. We conclude our discussion by proposing elements that are essential for spiritual assessment and intervention.

**Defining the spiritual dimension**

Throughout the ages, attempts have been made to define the spiritual dimension of persons. In most cases it is readily acknowledged that one correct definition that applies to everyone is difficult to determine, that any definition is psychologically and sociologically complex, and represents diversity. Some have suggested that a definition is satisfactory only to the original author. Thus, it must be acknowledged that any definition of the spiritual dimension

**FIGURE 1**

A Model for Spiritual Assessment and Intervention

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Expanded Functioning
- Peace
- Joy
- Contentment
- Forgiveness
- Healing
- Conversion
- Creation
- Creativity
- Confession
- Reconciliation
- Grace
- Hope
- Hopelessness
- Despair
- Alienation
- Isolation
- Apathy

Altered Functioning

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Theoretical Understanding of the Spiritual Dimension
- Belief & Meaning
- Authority & Influence
- Experience & Function
- Ritual & Practice
- Courage, Growth
- Volunteer, Contribute

Practical Understanding of the Spiritual Dimension
- Life Experiences, Events and Questions
- Birth, Life, Health, Illness, Pain, Suffering, Death
- Options
- Expanded Functioning
- Altered Functioning

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Developmental Stages of the Spiritual Dimension
- Theology
- Psychology
- Physiology
- Sociology

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Notes: points at which assessment and intervention occur