18.1: Spirituality Introduction

Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate principles of holistic care by incorporating cultural, religious, and spiritual influences on patient health
- Explain the interconnection between spirituality and religious concepts as they relate to health and spiritually sensitive nursing care
- Describe methods to assess the spiritual and religious preferences, strengths, concerns, or distress of clients and plan appropriate nursing care

Spirituality includes a sense of connection to something bigger than oneself and typically involves a search for meaning and purpose in life. People may describe a spiritual experience as sacred or transcendent or simply feel a deep sense of aliveness and interconnectedness. Some people’s spiritual life is linked to a religious association with a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue, whereas others pray and find comfort in a personal relationship with God or a higher power and still others find meaning through their connections to nature or art. A person’s definition of spirituality and sense of purpose often change throughout one’s lifetime as it evolves based on personal experiences and relationships.[1]

Over the past decade, research has demonstrated the importance of spirituality in health care. Spiritual distress is very common in patients and their family members experiencing serious illness, injury, or death, and nurses are on the front lines as they assist these individuals to cope. Addressing a patient’s spirituality and providing spiritual care have been shown to improve patients’ health and quality of life, including how they experience pain, cope with stress and suffering associated with serious illness, and approach end of life.[2][3]

Consensus-driven recommendations define a spiritual care model where all clinicians address spiritual issues and work with trained chaplains who are spiritual care specialists.[4][5] By therapeutically using presence, unconditional
acceptance, and compassion, nurses often provide spiritual care and help patients find hope and meaning in their life experiences. The Interprofessional Spiritual Care Education Curriculum (ISPEC), developed by George Washington University for health care professionals, is an education initiative to improve spiritual care for seriously ill patients in the United States and internationally. This chapter will introduce concepts included in the ISPEC curriculum, review religious beliefs and practices of various world religions, and discuss therapeutic interventions that nurses can use to promote patients’ and their own spiritual well-being.

Note
Read more about professional development opportunities regarding spiritual health using the Interprofessional Spiritual Care Education Curriculum (ISPEC) offered by George Washington University Institute for Spirituality and Health.

Explore more information about spirituality using free online resources provided by the University of Minnesota's Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality and Healing.