

The Significance of Spirituality in the Well Elderly

Joseph Molinatti, Ed. D. RN

Assistant Professor of Nursing

College of Mount Saint Vincent

Bronx, New York

USA

Objectives

- Identify patterns in healthy elderly associated with: meaning of spirituality, role spirituality plays, how the need is met and challenges to meeting this need
- Identify 5 specific content area in a baccalaureate nursing program where knowledge regarding spirituality in the healthy elderly can be integrated

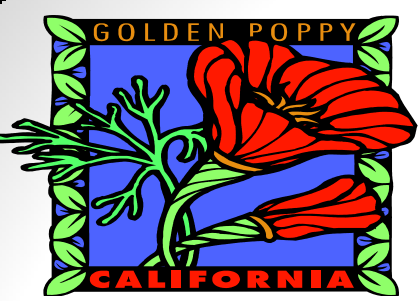
What Sparked My Interest?

- Earlier research dealt with Spirituality and the Well Elderly
- Review of the Literature focused and continues to focus predominantly on “ill” elderly
- What about well elderly
- Elderly population increasing
- Longer life span
- More independent living communities
- The population will continue to require comprehensive holistic nursing care
- Spirituality is an aspect of this care



Concept of Spirituality

- Definition: “...quality of having a dynamic and personal relationship with God.” “...meaning of life and a reason for being.”
- Opportunity: Sabbatical which would allow for further exploration of this concept building upon my earlier research.



Participants



- Met and discussed research, informed consents. Data would be coded and their identity protected.
- 26 Healthy Elderly Adults (13 from East Coast & 13 from West Coast).
- 65-85 years of age
- Living in their own residence
- Independent in all activities





Participants



- Community: Southern California and New York City
- Southern California: Two season type weather (warm and dry) climate throughout the year—no snow, ice. Temperature allows for outside activities 12 months per year.
- NYC: Four seasons. Hot summer, very cold winters, snow & ice, limiting outside activities

Methodology

- Qualitative Research
- Demographic data
- Nine Open-ended interview questions which were tape recorded
- Transcriptions provided data for analysis
- Grounded Theory



Questions

- “When I say the word “spirituality” what does it mean to you?”
- “How is spirituality important in your life?”
- “Are there people, activities, or resources that help you meet your spiritual needs?”
- “In what way might your definition of spirituality be applied to your life?”
- “How has spirituality influenced your life?”

Questions

- “At what point did you become aware of the concept of spirituality?”
- “Have you ever had any experience(s) that have been particularly spiritually significant to you?”
- “Over time has the concept of spirituality taken on a different meaning in your life?”
- “What factors influence your decision to pursue your spiritual needs?”

Common Patterns/Themes

- Repeated in the majority of the interviews
 - Prayer
 - Communicate with “greater force”
[higher power]
 - Daily mass
 - Church/Synagogue
 - Family
 - Friendship

Other Patterns/Themes

- Being one with nature
- Participating in cultural experiences
- Holiday gatherings
- Creation of life [human birth]
- Belief in life-after-death
- Seeking miracles after a tragedy
- Hospice volunteer

Results/Findings

- Regardless of demographic data or location
 - Family history
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Work background
 - Environment
 - Religious upbringing

Spirituality important

Powerful influence

Guidance of spiritual force

Implication for Practice, Education, and Research

- Research will add to the existing body of knowledge integral to nursing curriculum in undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Nursing should evaluate their programs, and incorporate spirituality as it relates not only to ill but also healthy elderly.
- Present and future nurses should have an in depth knowledge of spirituality in relationship to ill and well elderly
- Promote volunteer positions for well elderly in Hospice, Acute Care, Home Care and nursing homes to address the volunteer's concept of spirituality
- Promote meditation sessions/meditation areas

Practice and Research

- Tour maternity units
- Volunteer in newborn and neonatal units for feeding and rocking
- The Joint Commission in the USA requires assessment of the concept of spirituality in patients receiving Medicare benefits so we already have this concept identified as part of holistic care in hospitalized patients
- Further incorporating the well elderly as part of this holistic approach in nursing
- Further Research is needed

Content Areas Where Information Can Be Included:

- Theory/Research
- Health Promotion
- Health Assessment
- Adult Medical-Surgical Course
- Community Health
- Geriatric Course
- Nurse Core Case Management Course

References

- Catanzaro, A. M. & Mc Mullen, K. (2001). In D. M. L. Newman (Ed.). *Journal Christian Nursing*, Vol 33, pp 33-37).
- Clarke, J. (2009). A critical view of how nursing defined spirituality. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 18, 1666-1673. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2702.2008.02707. Ehrlich, S. D. (2009). Spirituality. American healthcare commission, 4-7. <http://www.umm.ed/altmed/articles/spirituality-000360.htm>.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: CA. Sage Publication.
- Mowdy, R. (2012). In J. T. Catalano (Ed.) *Nursing now! Today's issues, tomorrow's trends*. F. A. Davis, Philadelphia.
- Other references by request