

Interprofessional Teams Integrate Spirituality into Patient Care: Lesson Learned

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Background

Spirituality, broadly defined as that which gives meaning and purpose to life, is important to patients.

Evidence suggests that spirituality, whether expressed through religious or secular means, is a crucial component of patient care. Yet clinicians are sometimes reluctant to address spirituality in patient care because they:

- 1) Have limited preparation addressing spiritual issues
- 2) Fear that spiritual discussions require substantial time.

Purpose

This research aimed to:

- 1) Explore the value of spiritual screening in clinical practice
- 2) Determine ways healthcare professionals (HCPs) can utilize spiritual screening
- 3) Identify facilitators and challenges (barriers) to incorporating spirituality and spiritual screening into patient care.

Methods

Methodology: Descriptive, qualitative, exploratory

Setting: Three inpatient hospital units (palliative care, geriatric) in Alberta, Canada

Participants: Nine (9) healthcare professionals (HCPs) (physicians, registered nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, occupational therapists, and physical therapists) and 24 patients

Procedure: After a half-day educational event, the HCPs integrated spiritual screening into care of 24 patients. Patient chart data was gathered and qualitative data, regarding the experience of the HCPs, was obtained using focus groups.

Data Analysis: Qualitative, using thematic data analysis

Key Findings

Education about spiritual screening:

- Provided a framework for conducting spiritual screening
- Facilitated conversation between patients and HCPs
- Offered language to use when making referrals to Spirituality Care Professionals (SCPs)
- Offered ways to enact the professional competencies that include attending to patient's spiritual well-being

Facilitators to incorporating spiritual screening into patient care:

- A specific tool to guide spiritual screening
- Supportive SCPs to work with HCPs
- Clinical leader role models who practice spiritual care
- Organizational mission that emphasizes spiritual care
- Knowledge that addressing the spirituality often builds an immediate trusting relationship
- Growing professionally and personally when learning about and incorporating spiritual screening into patient care
- Feeling increased professional satisfaction that comes from deeper connections with patients and families

Challenges to incorporating spiritual screening into patient care:

- Feeling able to ask spiritual screening but uncomfortable with how to deal with information gathered
- Competing priorities on acute care units
- Organizational values inconsistently translated to practice



Conclusions

Healthcare Professionals (HCPs):

- Gained awareness of the need for all HCPs to screen, intervene and refer when appropriate regarding spiritual issues
- Acknowledged that attending to spirituality:
 - Facilitated connection with patients and their families, making future work with them more person-centred and effective
 - Enhanced their sense of job satisfaction

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