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The relevance of spirituality in healthcare: a perspective from nursing science

Spiritual Care and Health Professions:
 Context and Practice
 5th bi-annual international student conference,
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 Moses & Aaron Church, Amsterdam
 The Netherlands



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Spirituality

Is a topic in nursing theories and nursing research, like energy theories, therapeutic touch, health outcomes.


Spirituality is about:

- hope and strength
- trust
- meaning and purpose
- forgiveness
- belief and faith in self, others, and for some this includes a belief in a deity/ higher power
- peoples' values
- love and relationships
- morality
- creativity and self expression" (Royal College of Nursing, 2011)


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Spirituality and Health Care

- Research indicates that health professionals can play an important role in enhancing psycho-spiritual well-being of their patients and improving health outcomes.
- A recent investigation revealed that 23% of the patients would like to talk with a priest / chaplain about their spiritual needs, 20% had no partner to talk about these needs, while for 37% it is important to talk with their medical doctor about spiritual needs. (Büssing et al., 2009)


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The Illness Experience

**illness means:
suffering**


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Example: Chronic Illness

- Existential crisis: death in the foreground
- Life is lying in ruins
- Against this background: giving meaning and to rebuild once life
- *It has been said that 'Often it is not until crisis, illness...or suffering occurs that the illusion (of security) is shattered...illness,suffering...and ultimately death...become spiritual encounters as well as physical and emotional experiences' (Ganstrom in Hitchins, 1988).*


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Hope

„The concept of hope is complex, multifaceted, and multidimensional, so attempting a single definition is difficult and would lead to oversimplification. Hope is described as an emotion, an experience, a need, a characteristic, a state or a dynamic process with affective, functional, contextual, temporal, and relational dimensions.“ (Verhaeghe, 2007)


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Hope

„Hope can be defined as keeping a possible positive outcome in mind in an uncertain situation, even if ones knows that this outcome is unlikely to happen. Hoping is a cognitive process in wich the positive has a place.“ (Verhaeghe, 2007)


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Hope: answer to the existential crisis

- Is not easy to create
- Is an active process
- Patients task: to create, foster and maintain hope


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Function of hope


- Death is like behind a wind shield
- Life without hope is impossible


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Hope and family members

Hope is almost constantly present, but what is hoped changes as times goes by. We found that the evolution of hope is not streamlined, but moves stepwise: it remains at the same level for a certain period of time and relatively suddenly falls or rises insteps, depending in particular on events and information.“ (Verhaeghe 2007)

Hope exists in all phases of transitions family members have to undergo: *overcoming the acute crisis, being responsible, striving for balance.* (Horn 2008)


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Research and practice

- *The practice of spiritual care is about meeting people at the point of deepest need. It is about not just 'doing to' but 'being with' them. It is about our attitudes, behaviours and our personal qualities i.e. how we are with people. It is about treating spiritual needs with the same level of attention as physical needs.* (RCN, 2011)