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## **What do nursing students have to say about spirituality and their preparation to provide spiritual care?**

Author:

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### **Content:**

*Introduction:* Nurses' holistic approach should include attention to patients' spiritual needs and in this regard they develop those skills for the benefit of the sick as well as to educate nursing students in the clinical setting. Nursing research suggests that education about spirituality is insufficient and calls for greater emphasis on this subject in the curriculum. Nursing students from a Portuguese school attended a nine hour program about spirituality during the second year of their undergraduate degree course in 2008.

*Methodology:* This is an exploratory research in which nursing students from 1st to 4th year undergraduate degree students of all years of undergraduate nursing were invited to respond to an e-mail questionnaire about their perception about spirituality and their preparation to provide spiritual care. The data collection instrument comprised five parts with open, closed and mixed questions. They consented to participate and the research was approved by the institution. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis.

*Results:* 24 of 168 responded (14.3%), they were aged between 18 and 28 years, 87% female and 79% Catholic. They perceived spirituality to be a dimension of the human being, important for the health, well being and meaning in life. It is individual, universal, interior and transcendent. It relates to the mystery of life, beliefs and values and is broader than religion. Students used spiritual needs and spiritual care to describe the attention to a holistic approach to patients. All the members of the health team are responsible for spiritual care, but the nurse has the privilege to spend more time with their patient. Students who attended the program recognize its importance in the perception of patients' health responses, a new vision about nursing care, new knowledge and personal development. Most students consider that this is an important aspect in their training and do not feel prepared to provide spiritual care.

*Discussion:* Even students who attended the program feel the need for more preparation. The nursing diagnoses that students set in their practices range from fear, sadness, suffering, spiritual well-being or grieve, confirming the subjectivity of spiritual diagnosis. The 1st year students feel afraid of this issue and the 2nd and 3rd years, despite attending the training, feel the need of more preparation. Despite the limitations in sample size, the results indicate the emergence of attention to spirituality in the curriculum and in monitoring students in the clinical setting about this subject.

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