

Spirituality and nursing, for the well-being of all

Spirituality relates to what gives us hope, meaning, and purpose. Spirituality fits naturally into the holistic nature of the care provided by nurses to people going through life trials: health accident, serious and incurable illness, chronic illness, end of life, etc.

A British advanced practice nurse, who enriched her training with a doctorate in spirituality, sheds light on this approach to care, undoubtedly less formalized in France than in the United Kingdom, and suggests resources to progress both in a personal capacity and as part of nursing practice.

Spirituality is sometimes seen as a controversial subject. Universally, nursing sees spirituality as an integral part of holistic care. However, there is little agreement on the practicalities of what this may mean for patients in day-to-day care.

A misconception of the term spirituality resulting from confusion with religion is common. Yet spirituality is a very distinct concept from religion even though they overlap in some ways.

In practice, nurses report that they omit spiritual care because of this ambivalence and anxiety about how to integrate it into their practice. (Rogers and Wattis 2015).

Additionally, as care becomes more technologically driven and care load constraints increase, spiritual care can be neglected. This brief article will provide an overview of spirituality with some tips for nurses on how to integrate it into the care they provide.

T1 Conceptual benchmarks

There are multiple debates and discussions about how nurses should define spirituality (Clarke 2013, Koenig et al 2011; McSherry 2006, McSherry 2007; Ross 2006, Swinton & Pattison 2010; Rogers & Wattis 2015). Personally, I find it relevant to conceptualize spirituality as being "human", which is also taken up in nursing literature (Clarke 2013 p43). Spirituality impacts each of us and relates to what gives us hope, meaning and purpose. For some it may be their culture or their faith, but for others it may be related to relationships, work, hobbies and pets for example.

If spirituality is intrinsically "human," the care that goes with it must be the same as that we hope for ourselves or our family members. This care incorporates the core values of nursing, such as empathy, compassion, understanding, respect. When talking to colleagues, they often tell me that spirituality is too complex to be understood and integrated into practice. This is not the case, however, because in reality, spirituality is expressed in the best of nursing with great simplicity.

T1 Spirituality and good practices

Patients often share their deepest concerns and concerns with nurses. In times of ill health, distress, and life-changing events, it is common for patients to begin asking spiritual or existential questions; for example: "Why is this happening to me? How am I going to handle this? How is this going to change my life?" »(Rogers and Wattis 2015, Rogers 2016).

These important questions are openings that can allow nurses to approach spirituality. The key to answering these kinds of questions lies in the concepts of hope, meaning, and purpose which are fundamental aspects of spirituality (Rogers and Wattis 2015).

Clarke (2013), for her part, identified spirituality as an essential element of good practice and holistic care. Despite this, Lewinson et al (2018) suggested that nurses do not know what spirituality means and how to integrate it into care; this is often not the case.

T1 Adapted training

Many nurses may not have received any training or education in spirituality. Ali et al (2018) recognized that the lack of educational preparation and explicit teaching of spirituality in the undergraduate nursing program hinders the integration of spirituality into care.

A major European study recently published the results of its work to help nurses understand and integrate spirituality into practice. The spiritual skills that should be taught to all undergraduate nurses and midwives (Compassionate Care (EPICC) 2019) were thus identified.

Four competencies are identified by EPICC (2019) and suggested to nurses and teachers as the basis of spiritual care:

- Intrapersonal spirituality: become aware of the importance of spirituality on health and well-being;
- Interpersonal spirituality: opening up to the spirituality of people, recognizing their visions of the world, their beliefs and their unique spiritual and cultural practices;

- Spiritual care in an assessment and planning process: assess the spiritual needs of patients and their resources using appropriate formal or informal approaches (specify, please). Plan spiritual care while maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed consent from the patient.
- Spiritual care in an intervention and evaluation process: responding to spiritual needs and resources in a relationship of compassion ". (EPICC 2019)

The data and guidance provided by EPICC provides a rich resource to help nurses understand how to integrate spirituality into practice with many practical resources available for free download¹.

T1 In daily practice

As part of these competencies identified by EPICC (2019), it is emphasized that to provide spiritual care, nurses must take into account their own spirituality. In addition, a framework with various practical tips suggested to them to guide the integration of spirituality into practice according to the skills described by EPICC (Rogers 2016, Rogers 2017, Rogers & Beres 2017).

This framework invites nurses to work in a way that considers their own availability and vulnerability, as well as that of those in care. Likewise, nurses are encouraged to make themselves available to listen to their patients' stories and to respond to their needs with empathy and respect. This requires being fully available when providing care in order to develop a person-centered approach rather than focused on the sequence of tasks to be accomplished.

Many nurses recognize that being at work and simply doing the necessary tasks does not correspond to the holistic approach to care. However, the heavy nursing load can often limit holistic care and lead to stress and burnout (Wright 2006).

On the contrary, providing spiritual care by being fully present and connected to patients during care can reduce burn out as nurses can connect to what may have brought them into nursing, to connect with those in their care. Nurses must ensure that they take care of themselves by allowing themselves in particular compassion towards themselves. Supervision and reflection can help. Stevens Barnum (2011) emphasizes that being fully present to patients is essential to establishing a therapeutic relationship and integrating spirituality.

T1 To conclude

In order to better understand spirituality, the EPICC website has a wide range of resources and information. Spirituality is an integral part of holistic healing and does not require additional time. It simply needs nurses to reconnect with the essence of holistic care where each patient is seen as an individual with bio-psycho-social and spiritual needs and treated as a human companion who deserves kindness, empathy, care, compassion, understanding and respect.

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Keywords: nursing, spirituality, humanity, empathy, skills

Notes

1 - <https://blogs.bmj.com/ebn/2018/01/22/enhancing-nurses-competence-in-providing-spiritual-care-through-innovative-education-and-compassionate-care-epicc>

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