


Chapter 11

The Soulful Prescription: Merging Spirituality With Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial, it has been embedded in the minds and hearts of healthcare providers to always prioritise the needs of their patients. From the excitement of the first day of medical school to the nerves of the first day in the hospital as medical staff, we are taught to care for others, oftentimes at the expense of our own well-being. While some of us manage to balance work and personal lives, too many healthcare providers end up dealing with the consequences of overlooking their own needs and eventually develop a redundant outlook to their work which is at odds with this sensitive profession. This is where spiritual wellbeing makes its entrance. Spirituality, in its truest essence, aims to attach “meaning” to everything we do. In simple terms, it helps us discover a purpose in life, which becomes the basic foundation from which healthcare providers then navigate this precious field of serving humanity. It forms the groundwork for resilience, which is an imperative part of medicine.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of spirituality is quite complex, with various definitions linked to it all over the globe. There is no single consensus, as validated by Reinert and Koenig (2013): “There is no ‘gold standard’ for the definition of spirituality that can be established independent of the historical use of the term in the English lan-

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guage or the Greek or Latin roots from which the word ‘spirituality’ is derived” (p. 2623). The root word for spirituality is the Latin word *spiritus* and the Greek word *pneûma*, both of which mean ‘breath,’ ‘soul,’ or ‘spirit,’ and hence one of the ways spirituality can be described is as a deep connection to the self, wandering on the soul’s horizon and craving a connection beyond the material world.

Spirituality can often be interlinked with religion, since both address fundamental human concerns about meaning, purpose, morality, and an attachment with something greater than oneself. If we break them down, religion is typically seen as an organized system of beliefs and rituals, while spirituality is a more personal quest for meaning or connection to something greater—whether through God, nature, or inner reflection—but both share a common goal of seeking the sacred through individual thoughts, emotions, and actions (Yuen, 2007). Hill et al. (2000) state, “*Both spirituality and religion are complex phenomena, multidimensional in nature, and any single definition is likely to reflect a limited perspective or interest*” (p. 52), while Baldacchino (2015) believes that spirituality extends beyond religious belief in the universal search for meaning and purpose, because it is attainable and yearned for by both believers and non-believers. Moberg (2010) maintains the view that spirituality is a broad idea, and from it came the many religions and belief systems in the world, while Saad and de Medeiros (2021) consider that spirituality can encompass a wide range of elements from non-religious concepts such as an optimistic mindset to intensely religious experiences. In either stance, the practices and teachings that are learned through religion and spirituality awaken, support, and meet the deep needs that come from the spiritual nature within each person.

For some people, spirituality is the ultimate basis of meaning and purpose in life (Foglio & Brody, 1988) and a hope to connect with something sacred or important and involves values and beliefs that can resonate through one’s thoughts, feelings, and deeds (Büssing et al., 2014). Puchalski et al. (2014) defines spirituality as “a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, and transcendence, and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred. Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions, and practices.” (p. 646). Despite the diverse descriptions and terminologies, every notion regarding spirituality believes that it changes us for the better. The pursuit of inner peace and personal transformation, and the desire to connect with a higher power, brings about a rejuvenating experience within ourselves. The life-changing influence of our personal experience with the Divine is one of the greatest ways to feel empowerment and peace. In an article by Yawar (2001), it is explained that two realms of existence are considered to be linked with human beings; there is the outer realm, which comprises the human being’s interrelatedness with the world and mostly consists of practicing qualities such as justice and generosity, and then there is the inner realm, which

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