Chapter 2
Spirituality and Aging

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the available literature on different aspects of spirituality and health in old age. Old age is marked with physical, mental and social dysfunctions whereas spirituality provides the way to overcome these difficulties. The Asian scriptures give a very clear evidence that spirituality is the way of life that has a meaning, a purpose and connectedness with others. In the Indian description, Vasudhaiv Kutubhkam, it points towards the spiritual interconnectedness. The spiritual practices give a meaning and purpose to life therefore instills a feeling of hope which can protect against mental disorders. The same also strengthen immune system protecting us from physical problems connectedness with others is the ultimate aim of spirituality. With increasing age and degenerative processing taking place in the body, spiritual practices by elderly, make them feel a part of community and improves physical health status.

Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, Concentrate the mind on the present moment (Buddha)

WHY HEALTH PROFESSIONALS NEED STUDY SPIRITUALITY

Over the last several decades, the concept of spirituality has come to the forefront of public and professional interest. With the dawn of a new century, spirituality has received increased coverage in the media and more discussion in the workplace, in politics, and in education (Messikomer & De Craemer, 2002). Spirituality has also become more apparent in health care, with increasing evidence that spiritual

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factors are important components of health and well-being (Dossey, 2001). The need for health care providers to effectively address the connection between spirituality and health is becoming broadly recognized as more people want spiritual content to their health care. And in this regard Burkhardt and Nagai-Jacobson (2002) quoted Spirituality, “Spirituality is at the heart of caring for the whole person”. Yet the lack of a clear definition or a concise conceptual framework, coupled with limited opportunities for spiritual training and professional development of health care providers, has resulted in the neglect of this aspect of patient care.

INTRODUCTION

The word “spirituality” has been derived from the Latin word “spiritus” meaning breath or life, with the Latin “spiritulis” meaning “of the spirit”. The term, frequently cited in the Hebraic Old Testament (ruach) and the Greek New Testament (pneuma), has historically been referenced in the context of religion and is still both experienced and expressed by many through conventional religious understanding (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). There are several definitions of spirituality. It has been defined by theorists as “the human response to God’s gracious call to a relationship with himself” (Benner, 1989), “a subjective experience of the sacred” (Vaughan, 1991), and “…that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities, with God, with love, with compassion, with purpose…” (Tart, 1983). A popular definition of spirituality was proposed by Koenig and Carson, (2012), stated spirituality as the personal quest for understanding answers to the ultimate question of life about its meaning and relationship with the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from development of religious rituals and the formation of a community. Spilka’s, (1993) reviewed literature and concluded that most contemporary understandings of spirituality fall into one of three categories: 1) a God-oriented spirituality where thought and practice are subsumed in theologies, either broadly or narrowly conceived; 2) a world-oriented spirituality which stresses one’s relationship with ecology or nature; or 3) a humanistic (or people-oriented) spirituality which stresses human achievement or potential. Thus, according to Spilka, spirituality should be viewed as a multidimensional construct.

NATURE OF SPIRITUALITY

Some of the viewpoints about the nature of spirituality is described in the following manner.

- **Spirituality as Being Innate:** Many authors view spirituality as the heart of human experience (McCarroll, O’Connor, & Meakes, 2005). It is not only believed that “each individual has spiritual needs” (Oldnall, 1996). It is also claimed that “human spirituality in a very real sense that unifies the whole person”. Spirituality can thus be seen as a basic, innate and vital component of being human which means simply understanding that others are human too. They have equal rights with you and you should treat them as you wish they treat you.

- **Spirituality as Being Emotive:** Spirituality is essentially emotive because it touches people’s hearts as it deals with the very essence of being. Therefore, it is imperative for people in positions of power to remember that they cannot be neutral and hence they must try to be objective in examining the concepts of spirituality and spiritual health. (Warren, 1988).