Spirituality and Geriatric Palliative Care

Advanced Concepts in Geriatric Care: Pain and Palliative Care Issues
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Spirituality

- is lived faith
- cuts across denominational lines
- sees all of life as a chance to uncover the "holy"
- includes vision, lifestyle & experience
- gives ultimate meaning & purpose to life
- is the ultimate ground of all of our hopes, fears, questions & loves
- may or may not be expressed through participation in a religion
Spirituality is concerned with a transcendental or existential way to live one’s life at a deeper level, “With the person as human being.”

Spirituality

Can be understood as a person’s search for ultimate meaning in the context of religious values, beliefs and practices or other expressions such as relationships with families, communities or work as well as the arts, nature and the humanities.”

Association of American Medical Colleges Contemporary Issues in Medicine: Communication in Medicine, Report 1, 1999:p27.
Religion

• is the framework people put around their spiritual beliefs
• Includes
  – organizational participation
  – private religious behavior
  – doctrines, activities, moral codes, individual & corporate rituals, practices
Spiritual Care is discovering reverencing and tending to the spirit of another person.

-Rev. Joseph Driscoll
End-of-Life Experience
How one finds meaning out of illness, suffering and dying.
Explains cause and effect.
Defines role of healers.
The journey with another begins with your self-awareness. Everything builds on that.
WHO ARE YOU?
How do you answer the following?

• What is life and death?
• What were you taught in the church/mosque/temple/meeting about suffering/pain?
• What has life taught you?
• In the midst of suffering and pain we ask questions…
• Think…
What is your personal history with suffering? From what place do you draw your energy? What kind of space do you draw around yourself? Awareness of this will help with existential questions people ask.
Your Spirituality meets Another’s

Ask yourself-

• What does my faith have to do with this situation?

• How do I invite the other to share?
Each individual’s concept of the Divine is what makes each spiritual journey unique.

Remember.
The Divine is already present before You show up.
Overall Things to Remember for Patients of Any Age

- Be present. Be honest. Be real. Listen.
- Get to know patient’s life story.
- How does patient define him/herself?
  - Loss of identity, independence, familiar roles, lost activities.
- How does he/she hope to be remembered?
- Need for reconciliation/forgiveness
Maintaining Hope in Elderly Cancer Patients

• Be present. Be honest. Be real. Listen.
• How does the patient define hope?
• Ask: Do you have hopes and dreams that are threatened by this illness?
  – Validate patient’s possible loss of these dreams.
  – Recognize and validate their feelings of anger, sadness and denial.
  – Encourage patient to talk about losses.
  – Encourage patient to make short, medium and long term goals realizing that illness is unpredictable.
  – Ask about spiritual/religious rituals/contacts, etc. that might be helpful.
• Make a referral to a chaplain.
Spirituality/Religiosity in Patients with Dementia

- Explore patient’s life story (often via family members).
- Explore patient’s spiritual/religious past.
- Meaning and purpose in patient’s life.
- Patient’s beliefs about afterlife.
- Explore patient's wishes/desires for end of life.
- Use spiritual resources—music, meditation, life story
- Make referral to chaplain
Maintaining Meaning & Purpose in Geriatric Patients with Heart Disease

- Does patient have a spiritual support system?
- Help patient to express emotions that accompany grief and loss
  - Denial, anger, sadness, depression, fear, relief, guilt
- Ask: what gives meaning to your life?
  - Restoring meaning by finding meaning in the present situation
  - Review meaning that has sustained the patient throughout life
  - Re-evaluate/re-work one’s patient’s faith system in light of the present crisis
“Who is there in all the world who listens to us? Here I am, this is me in my nakedness, with my wounds, my secret grief, my despair, my betrayal, my pain which I can’t express, my terror, my abandonment.
Oh listen, to me for a day, an hour, a moment, lest I expire in my terrible wilderness, my lonely silence. Oh God, is there no one to listen?”

Seneca
Suggested Resource