

Navigating the Spiritual Landscape: Integrating Spirituality in Interdisciplinary Palliative Care for Advanced Illness through Education and Raising Awareness



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Introduction

The essence of spirituality is characterized by the pursuit of meaning and wholeness through ethical principles, relationships, and religious beliefs. Spirituality is thought of as equally important as the other human needs: organic, mental and social. The inclusion and integration of spirituality in what we call holistic palliative care would be fully in line with the definition of health according to WHO, where health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1946). This literature review explores spirituality with emphasis on the role of education and awareness of health professionals in palliative care. Do healthcare professionals feel prepared and competent to integrate spirituality in their care for patients in advanced illness?



Main Themes:

Although spirituality is recognized by all reviewed studies as pivotal in the delivery of holistic palliative care, healthcare professionals are unclear and feel unprepared on how to include it in their care.

Healthcare professionals experience lack of awareness on the following: a) spirituality being essential part of one's self, b) need for continuous assessment and management of spiritual needs, c) appropriate ways to include it in care.

These studies show that healthcare professionals still hesitate to address spiritual care needs of patients in advanced illness and they recognize lack of education as the main inhibiting factor.

Material and Method:

Literature search: non systematic

- Search time frame from 2013-2023, English language, empirical studies
- Keywords: spirituality, palliative care, interdisciplinary team, healthcare professionals, education, training
- Databases: PubMed, Google Scholar, CINAHL, manual searches through reference lists

The search yielded 80 articles

Screening resulted in the inclusion of 12 articles

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Results:

The review included twelve articles in seven countries: eleven of them were qualitative and one was quantitative. Spirituality in all studies emerges as an essential component of effective palliative care. Common themes, such as recognizing and supporting patients' spiritual needs, are illuminated in various settings, by nurses, physicians, social workers, psychologists, physical therapists etc. Nevertheless, the adoption and integration of spirituality in clinical care is a major challenge for healthcare professionals. Although it is widely accepted that health services should address the holistic needs of individuals (physical, psychological and spiritual), health professionals describe they feel more comfortable addressing physical and psychological needs and feel less able to manage the spiritual aspect of care. Studies describe similar challenges such as time constraints, fear of inadequacy in managing spiritual care, failure to address spiritual care and difficulties discussing spirituality with patients. The review highlights the perceived necessity of incorporating spirituality into educational programs for healthcare professionals, emphasizing the role of interdisciplinary collaboration. A common finding is the common need of all professionals to be better prepared for the provision of spiritual care.

Conclusion – Key points

This literature review underscores the critical importance of integrating the spiritual dimension into healthcare professionals' education programs. Lack of education is identified as a primary barrier, emphasizing the urgent need for increased awareness as well as a comprehensive approach to providing spiritual care. It is suggested that spiritual care will be also enhanced by including training in spiritual assessment and care to healthcare professionals in an undergraduate level and subsequently in a clinical context. Gaining a deeper understanding and managing spiritual needs through an interdisciplinary approach may enhance the quality of care provided.

Another common theme is that healthcare professionals' individual sense and awareness of spirituality significantly influence the ability to provide spiritual care. Finally, the literature review highlights the necessity to delve deeper into the meaning of spirituality for healthcare professionals in palliative care, outlining a plan for future research in this domain.