

## Assessing Patients Spirituality: A New Age Holistic Approach or a Forgotten Nursing Practice? **Sofia Zyga<sup>1</sup>**

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*"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."*

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881 – 1955), French Jesuit, paleontologist, biologist, and philosopher.*

Spirituality.....A single word yet with many definitions due to the fact that it may comprise several aspects of human existence. Spirituality is often linked to the human spirit thus it is considered as a superior component for human existence [1]. Furthermore, it is recognized as one of the basic components of health and well-being and as a basic dimension of wellness along with others such as occupational, physical, emotional, social and intellectual [2].

The term spirituality refers to a sense of purpose, a sense of 'connectedness' – to self, others, nature or 'God'. It is used to describe a quest for wholeness, for hope or harmony, a belief in a higher being or beings, some level of transcendence, or the sense that there is more to life than the material or practical, and those activities that give meaning and value to people's lives [3]. Thus, spirituality fulfills the needs of the person associated with the meaning of life, illness, crisis and death. It gives the person a sense of security and leads the person through their daily routine. It provides psychological and social support, especially in homogeneous populations. It is a resource to raise strength and support in order the individual to meet life's demands and crises [4,5].

The relation between spirituality and health is documented since antiquity. For centuries, the therapist and the religious leader was often the same person, thus the same person was caring for the body and spirit [6]. For many people, spirituality and religion are important dimensions of their existence, are a source of

support and contribute to wellbeing and coping with everyday difficulties. For many patients, the integration of spiritual beliefs in the therapeutic process is vital and has been found to correlate with positive health outcomes [5].

New age holistic approaches in health and health care services take into consideration all aspects of the individuality of the patient and the needs arising from them including mental, social and spiritual. Those contemporary aspects of treatment address the individual as a whole, an entirety consisting of body, mind, soul and spirit as a unit and not just a body. New evidence arising from scientific research, suggest that by meeting a patient's spiritual needs we can significantly contribute to their adaptation to illness and into a better rehabilitation. Recognizing and addressing spiritual needs is vital and important, especially in the multidimensional context of a chronic disease [7,8].

Although the concept of spirituality has gained researchers' interest not only in nursing but also in health care professions in general, the spiritual factor is associated with the nursing practice [9]. Even in the most primitive forms of nursing, patient care was holistic including spiritual and religious care as well. From asclapieia and hostels, forerunners of today's hospitals in the Byzantine era, patients received physical and spiritual care as well [10,11]. In addition, the theoretical foundation of nursing suggests a holistic model for health care. Since the beginning of nursing it had been made clear that patient care cannot and should not be one-dimensional but an entity composed of biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimension [12]. Florence Nightingale herself introduced ingredients for the healing process such as environment, touch, light, scents, music, silent reflection and birds. Each of them contribute in such way that the person could feel connected with others, the nature even with the

divine, such items are promoting peace and security providing this way spiritual care to the patient [13].

Over the years many studies have been carried out in the effort to prove the influence of spirituality in human health, in patients suffering by heart failure, cancer, or even AIDS. Many studies concluded that patients' spiritual beliefs are related with health, longevity and recovery from physical conditions. Emerging evidence from the international literature about spirituality suggests that it can even positively affect the immune system through stress management mechanisms [14]. It seems to be an

effective coping strategy for stressful situations; it is a resource for social support and empowerment. The participation of patients in religious and spiritual practices appears to reduce the chances of developing depression and melancholia [14-16].

Regardless who, why and when began to assess spirituality within the treatment context, it is an important component of health related quality of life and it's influencing health outcomes. Assessing patient's spiritual needs is a necessity and addressing them when they arise is important. Incorporating spirituality into nursing care improves patient well-being and satisfaction.

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