Influence of Spirituality on Health

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African American Reach and Teach Health Ministry
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Learning Objectives

1. Explore the meaning and utility of spirituality
2. Examine how spirituality impacts and influences health
3. Expand personal and professional willingness and abilities to consider spirituality as a component of care
• Spirituality is a broad concept with many layers

• Religion and spirituality are discussed together but are not the same
Spirituality Defined

• A dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity
• Used to find purpose, meaning, and transcendence
• Used to experience relationship to self, family, others, community
• What life is all about
Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions, and practices.

Determining what gives you a sense of meaning in life.

Our experience of how we relate to whatever is greater than ourselves and gives meaning to our lives.

An experience unique to each person.

Involves how we are connected to one another.
## Religion Defined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A system of beliefs</th>
<th>Religions in the United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A system of practices</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Defined by a specific community or social group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May include spirituality</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Search for significance within the context of established institutions focused on issues related to spirituality</td>
<td>Protestantism (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholicism (21%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generic Christian (20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mormon (1%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unitarian (1%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Judaism (2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Islam (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buddhism (2%)</td>
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</table>
Spirituality is about Connections

To a higher power
To humankind
To nature
To life experience
To the cosmos
To mystery
What is the Health Connection?

American Association of Medical Colleges (1999): “Spirituality is recognized as a factor that contributed to health in many persons. The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and societies. It is expressed in an individual’s search for ultimate meaning through participation in religion and/or belief in God, family, naturalism, rationalism, humanism, and the arts. All of these factors can influence how patients and health care professionals perceive health and illness and how they interact with one another”
Beliefs and Practices Vary

Naturalism: everything comes from natural properties and causes

Rationalism: opinions and actions should be based on reason and knowledge

Humanism: Primary importance is the human rather than the divine

The Arts: focus on the application and/or the expression of human creative skills and imagination
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<th>Prayer 1X/Week</th>
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<td>14%</td>
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<td>17%</td>
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<td>44%</td>
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<td>9%</td>
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<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainline Protestant</td>
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<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
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<td>71%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthodox Christian</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated (Religious Nones)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Religion and Spirituality Affect a Range of Health Issues

• Physical Health: people who attend weekly services with a supportive community live longer; religious people, on average, smoke less, exercise more, eat more healthy foods engage in less risky behaviors

• Mental Health: meaning and connection can build optimism and reduce depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress

• Managing Chronic Illnesses: having a spiritual practice can help tolerate pain and improve functioning

• Handling Disruptive Occurrences: engaging in spiritual practices increases ability to handle stress, loss, and the effects of war
Spirituality is important for most patients;

Spiritual needs are common;

Spiritual care is frequently desired by patients;

Spiritual needs are infrequently addressed in medical care;

Spirituality can play a role in medical decision making;

Spiritual care is infrequent in medical care;

Unaddressed spiritual needs are associated with poorer patient quality of life;

Provision of spiritual care is associated with better patient end-of-life outcomes.
Frequent religious/spiritual service attendance is associated with a lower risk of mortality;

Frequent attendance is associated with subsequent less smoking and use of alcohol, marijuana, and illicit drugs;

Frequent attendance is associated with subsequent better quality of life;

Frequent attendance is associated with subsequent better mental health outcomes;

There is a dose-response relationship between frequent attendance and lower risk of mortality;

Frequent attendance is associated with subsequent less smoking, risky sexual behaviors, and use of alcohol, marijuana, and illicit drugs in adolescents;

Frequent attendance is associated with fewer subsequent depressive symptoms;

Frequent attendance is associated with subsequent fewer suicidal behaviors.
What to DO????????
Implications for Health Outcomes

- Health professionals recognize and consider the benefits of spiritual community for improving well-being.
- Increase education of public health professionals and students regarding spirituality and health outcomes.
- Recognize spirituality as a social factor along with other social determinants of health.
- Intentionally include spirituality as a component in treatment planning.
- Identify the need for spiritual specialty care and advocate.
- Acknowledge spiritual injury.
- Acknowledge spiritual distress and suffering.
The FICA Spiritual History Tool

F (Faith): What gives life meaning?

I (Import or Influence): How does spirituality influence health practices?

C (Community): Which spiritual communities?

A (Address): What is the desired response?