

**Opinion Article***Copyright © All rights are reserved by Pamela H Cone*

A Spiritual Care Perspective on Caring for the Whole Person

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Nursing has long held that optimal patient care requires addressing the whole person rather than simply working to meet the physical or mental needs of an individual under our care [1]. Modern nursing historically focused on meeting physical needs and addressing mental health and/or illness is a more recent trend in healthcare. It is quite clear that many physical ailments are influenced by a person's mental state, and vice versa. Nurses around the globe are generally trained to notice when cognitive and/or emotional issues impinge on the patient's physical condition. However, spiritual care is often left completely out of the equation [2].

Spiritual care is recognized by the International Council for Nurses as care that recognizes the deeply felt needs of the person, and that respectful support and genuine caring are necessary in order to provide the uplift of spirits that people in vulnerable situations need for healing to be potentiated [1]. Mental health staff report that, while they provide care with respect and genuine concern, they rarely address the spiritual because of a lack of preparation to do so and a sense that they may cause more harm than good if they enter a domain for which they are unprepared [2,3]. Hospitalized patients may prefer to have a chaplain address concerns of a spiritual or religious nature, but they do feel the lack when nurses fail to meet them at a deeply personal level when needed [4].

Research from multiple domains of healthcare supports the need for care of the physical, mental, and spiritual as whole person care, both from the nurse and the patient perspective [5]. What nurses in mental health need to do is to learn how to recognize the patient

cues that signal a deeply held belief, whether in the religious realm or not, and to respond by either addressing the concern through providing presence and active listening, or by referring the patient to other appropriate healthcare or supplemental support personnel such as chaplains [3,6]. A raised awareness of the spiritual domain, comprehensive assessment, strong communication skills, and a deep knowledge of the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of one's healthcare team can help nurses working in any area of healthcare to facilitate spiritual care [7]. Moreover, nurse educators around the globe can utilize case scenarios and readings to help nurses prepare for, connect with, and reflect on the spiritual and to improve their spiritual care competencies across didactic and clinical learning opportunities [6,8].

Overall, nurses in all areas of healthcare need to learn to include spiritual care in order to provide whole person care [9]. Education in the spiritual domain should focus on helping each nurse to understand personal beliefs and values that might influence their care, to be open and respectful of their peers and patients, and to use all available resources in providing care [6,10]. Moreover, whole person and patient-centered care requires that nurses engage in care related to the spiritual domain. At the very least, nurses can utilize therapeutic communication techniques to engage their patients on the question of what is most important to the patient at that moment while actively listening and empathetically providing presence. Then patients may be willing to talk about their needs and their resources, and nurses can either address these concerns or make appropriate referrals to other healthcare personnel or partners in order to provide whole person support and facilitate healing across all domains of the patient.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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