Assessing Spiritual Needs at the End of Life

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What three memories from your life would you take into eternity with you?
How do the memories you would take into eternity relate to spirituality?
What does the word “spiritual” mean?
Religiosity vs. Spirituality

Religion – an organized system of beliefs and worship

Spirituality – broader concept; involves a quest for meaning and purpose in life; sense of relatedness to a transcendent dimension; multidimensional in nature
Why is spiritual assessment and care important?

Positive aspects of spirituality have been noted in numerous studies.

Spiritual well-being has been negatively correlated with loneliness (Miller, 1985) and anxiety (Kaczorowski, 1989).
Spirituality...

Positively correlated with:

Well-being and hardiness (Carson & Greene, 1992)

Hope (Mickley, Soeken, & Belcher, 1992)
Spirituality is associated with…

Less symptom distress in lung cancer patients (Meraviglia, 2004) and cancer patients in general (Laubmeir, Zakowski, & Bair, 2004)

Enhanced coping (Ferrell, Smith, Juarez, & Melancon, 2003)

Improved QOL (Brady, Peterman, Fitchett, Mo, & Cella, 1999)
Spirituality at the End of Life

Patients report spiritual issues to be of importance

Some patients rate spiritual issues to be nearly as great as pain control (Steinhauser, et al., 2000)

Patients near the EOL report their relationship with God contributed the most to their QOL (McMillan & Weitzner, 2000)
Why is spiritual assessment and care at the end of life important?

Enhanced spiritual well-being helps patients cope more effectively with terminal illness (Lin & Bauer-Wu, 2003)
The importance of spirituality to patients near the EOL has been supported. Research to fully understand specific spiritual needs of patients and their families is limited. Research to test interventions to improve spiritual well-being is needed (NIH, 2004)
Spiritual Needs of Patients at the EOL

Needs relate to six main themes:
Religion
Companionship
Involvement and control
Finishing business
Experiencing nature
Positive outlook  (Hermann, 2001)
Spiritual Needs Inventory

17 item questionnaire to assess spiritual needs

Hospice patients perceived the following as the most important spiritual needs:

Laugh
See smiles of others
Be with family
Think happy thoughts
Be with friends
Pray
Talk about day to day things

(Hermann, in press)
Spiritual needs are diverse
Patients may express spiritual needs in subtle ways such as questioning why they are dying
All patients have spiritual needs regardless of their religious beliefs
Spirituality is important to patients near the EOL but needs are often unmet
Spiritual needs that can be met independently, such as prayer, are met at a higher rate than those requiring the presence of others or requiring a higher functional status
Use of a formal assessment tool is needed as patients often have difficulty relating to a broad question related to spiritual needs.

Meeting patients’ and families’ spiritual needs requires an interdisciplinary approach.
How do the memories you would take into eternity relate to spirituality?
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