

Tips for Nurses: Spiritual Care



What it is: Spirituality may be defined as a person's connections to other people, to the natural world, or to what gives them meaning and purpose. Spirituality is very personal.

Why it matters: For many people, spirituality is important throughout life. Spiritual care may be especially important for older people at the end of life. Spiritual pain has a negative effect on well-being and may be expressed in a physical response (e.g., increased pain) or an emotional response (e.g., anxiety, depression or anger).

What I need to know: Providing spiritual support is an important aspect of palliative care.

A person's spirituality does not always include religious belief.

But, spirituality may be linked to religious belief and practices or recognition of a higher power.

Spiritual care includes:

- sensitive and respectful interactions
- patient communication
- activities like story-telling, reminiscing, mindfulness and meditation, prayer, therapeutic life review or dignity therapy.

Showing respect and support for a person's spirituality can reduce the distress of being ill or dying.

All people working in aged care can provide spiritual support. Some aged care staff may have skills to screen for spiritual needs, to plan spiritual care or to refer to spiritual care practitioners or faith representatives. Chaplains and faith representatives can provide religious spiritual care.

Actions

Use touch and eye contact that is appropriate, and a welcoming and unhurried approach to conversation.

Listen so that the person feels heard and valued.

Be sensitive to and respectful of the spiritual and religious needs of people in your care and their families. Allow for privacy and uninterrupted time for spiritual practice.

Offer opportunities for a connection with external spiritual practices.

Provide opportunities for discussion with chaplaincy staff, spiritual care practitioners or faith representatives. Facilitate opportunity for re-connection.

Offer activities and roles that give people purpose.

Tools

Tools that may be useful include:

The FICA tool can be used to guide conversations about spirituality.

ConnecTo is a tool adapted by Meaningful Ageing Australia to identify spiritual strengths and capacities, and spiritual weaknesses and vulnerabilities (not restricted to religion, requires payment).

Name:

My reflections:

In my place of work how is spirituality supported?

How could my own beliefs affect how I care for other people?

My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice
Tip Sheets:
Distress at the End of Life
Grief and Loss among Older People,
Families and Residents
Talking About Dying

References used to develop this sheet are available at
www.palliaged.com.au