

Oncology and Nononcology Nurses' Spiritual Well-Being and Attitudes Toward Spiritual Care: A Literature Review

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Purpose/Objectives: To review literature about oncology and non-oncology nurses' attitudes toward spiritual care and the way that their spiritual well-being influences those attitudes.

Data Sources: Published research and literature review articles, books, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations.

Data Synthesis: Spiritual considerations play an important part in the lives of patients with cancer. Therefore, nurses must not only examine their attitudes toward spiritual care but also identify variables that influence those attitudes. One of the major variables that may influence their attitudes is their own spiritual well-being.

Conclusions: A significant association exists between attitudes toward spiritual care and spiritual well-being in nurses who care for nononcology populations. However, little research examines oncology nurses' attitudes toward spiritual care and the way that their spiritual well-being affects those attitudes.

Implications for Nursing: Nurse researchers need to examine the spiritual dimension of oncology nurses and the way that this influences attitudes toward spiritual caregiving.

Key Points . . .

- Confronting a life-threatening illness such as cancer increases an individual's awareness of spiritual issues.
- Oncology nurses' perceptions of spiritual care will influence their ability to meet the spiritual needs of patients with cancer.
- Nurses need to focus on supporting the spiritual well-being of oncology nurses.

Because spiritual considerations play such an important part in the lives of patients with cancer, oncology nurses, concerned with the whole person, have a crucial role to perform in supporting their spiritual well-being. Therefore, researchers must explore not only oncology nurses' attitudes toward spiritual care but also the attributes that may influence their attitudes. Nursing research has demonstrated that nurses' evaluation of the importance of spiritual care may influence their incorporation of spiritual care in their care plans (Scott, Grzybowski, & Webb, 1994). In addition, studies have revealed an association between nurses' spiritual well-being and positive attitudes toward spiritual care (Cimino, 1992; Harris, 1994; Soeken & Carson, 1986). This review of the literature will focus on nurses' attitudes toward spiritual care and their spiritual well-being.

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The spiritual dimension is an integral component of humankind's health and well-being (Rubinfeld & McFarlane, 1984). At the core of the spiritual dimension is the drive to find meaning and purpose in life's experiences (Ross, 1995; Shelly & Fish, 1988). An individual's quest to find meaning and purpose is enhanced when confronted with a life-threatening illness such as cancer. Cancer is "the indelible mark of our mortality—a stark reminder that we are vulnerable creatures subject to pain, suffering, and death" (Vastyan, 1986, p. 110). Confrontation with mortality makes individuals shockingly aware that they are not masters of their fate (Vastyan).

Research has demonstrated the importance of the relationship between a diagnosis of cancer (at all its stages) and the spiritual domain. Studies have confirmed that a diagnosis of cancer may seriously affect an individual's spiritual well-being. Spiritual well-being scores among patients with cancer were lower than those of patients suffering from cardiovascular conditions (Buchanan, 1988). Spiritual well-being also has been correlated negatively with tension and depression (Fehring, Miller, & Shaw, 1997) in patients with cancer. On the other hand, spiritual strength, faith, religious practices, and faith in God or a higher being have been identified as characteristics that contribute to hopefulness in patients with cancer (Post-White et al., 1996).