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ABSTRACT

A cancer diagnosis, as with any serious illness, raises difficult questions: why me? Why now? Why should I suffer like this? What will happen to me after death? Unfortunately, the solution to these problems is neither immediate nor obvious. Moreover, these questions interfere with the ordered world of spirituality, often questioning existing thoughts in the existential and religious spheres. A diagnosis triggers deep questions about the meaning and purpose of life.

Keywords: Spirituality, cancer, psycho-oncology

INTRODUCTION

Simply put, spirituality is about the meaning that patients give to their lives, especially in times of stress, illness, or death. It is seen as a universal human trait. One way of expressing spirituality is religion, which is a set of organized beliefs about God that are shared by a community of people. However, spirituality is more than just religion. It also includes the arts, participation in the natural world, and other cultural beliefs and practices. It can therefore be understood as the inner life of man. When cancer disease appears, spirituality will be a source of additional stress or additional positive reinforcement. The uncertainty and the need to make many decisions can cause existential problems in patients. Spiritual anxiety manifests itself through questions such as: does this life have any meaning? Is there life after death?



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Why should I suffer? Has God abandoned me? Why is God doing this to me? A person often feels abandoned, unloved, and disconnected from everything and everyone. Then there is a feeling of hopelessness about future health and life. A person may lose faith. This anxiety can be compounded by conflicts between religious beliefs and recommended treatments. On the other hand, spirituality can assist in the therapy process, especially in understanding the current situation. Patients sometimes speak of their illness as a blessing or of being able to see life in a different, perhaps more meaningful way. It is not uncommon for people with cancer to make major changes in their lives - they change jobs and make decisions about relationships. In other words, they begin to prioritize what is important to them in the face of a life-threatening illness.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FACILITATE COPING WITH CANCER:

They give you the opportunity to perceive cancer in a way that makes it possible to find its meaning. Cancer should be an opportunity to learn something, deepen your faith, or pay attention to the things that are important in life. This is a kind of re-evaluation of your priorities. They make us understand the meaning of suffering. Each religion shows the role and meaning of suffering. In the case of atheist patients, they can find this meaning through philosophical ideologies or relationships with other people or with nature. In this way, it is easier for them to accept the illness. They get used to the fear of death. Religion allows us to believe that death is not the end, but the beginning of something new. Such belief diminishes the sense of fear and despair. For non-believers, believing that death is part of life means accepting that life will come to an end at some point. Of course, saying that our lives will end is not in itself spiritual. However, becoming aware of the finitude of one's life and



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integrating that awareness into one's own thinking is considered spiritual. They strengthen coping mechanisms. Thanks to religious practices, patients make some sense of their illness, have a sense of control over the situation, and experience a sense of comfort. They have hope. Their quality of life increases. They provide social support. Participation in spiritual, e.g. religious, practices leads to a sense of connection with others. Similarly, going to church allows you to be with other believers, meet God, talk to the priest, building a kind of social support. This reduces the feeling of isolation and loneliness. They provide emotional support. In a person who has an organized spiritual world, a reduction in anxiety, anger, and discomfort is observed. A sense of joy in life increases. There is hope, optimism, and a sense of inner peace. Prayer itself is an opportunity for patients to express their own emotions, feelings, and negative thoughts. Telling your sufferings to God or a spiritual confidant also creates some distance from your own problems. This insight allows you to change the interpretation of your situation. Similarly, meditation and yoga are designed to calm inner chaos and promote inner rest. They can reduce the side effects of treatment. Massage, meditation, or yoga can alleviate some of the unpleasant effects of treatment, such as lymphedema.

SPIRITUALITY AND THE CLINICAL INTERVIEW

Spiritual and especially religious beliefs can influence many decisions related to treatment and health care, especially those related to the ending of life. The medical history should therefore include spiritual issues not only in terms of building patient trust but also to ensure that treatment plans are aligned with the patient's beliefs and values. Not talking about it can lead to non-adherence to treatment. Unfortunately, while the issue of patients' spirituality is important, it is rarely discussed with the



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medical team. As patients indicate, these conversations with care members occur only sporadically. The spiritual needs of cancer patients are often marginalized due to time constraints and the need to deal with higher-priority issues, as well as the medical staff's uncertainty about their role in this regard. So far, in the context of a patient's recovery and well-being, most attention has been paid to the biological, psychological, and social aspects (the so-called biopsychosocial model). Currently, the aspect of spirituality (the bio-psycho-social-spiritual model) is increasingly being added to these elements. In this model, the approach to patient care consists of examining all dimensions of patient functioning, including the spiritual dimension. Indeed, it is recognized that spirituality underlies the other dimensions. It is the essence of humanity. Working on the spiritual aspect can take many forms. Spiritual practices that can help you cope with your illness include: talking with the chaplain, psychologist, or spiritual guide setting aside time to pray or meditate regularly reading spiritual writings, various faith-based texts, books on spirituality staying in places that allow you to cultivate peace: natural landscapes, museums enjoying the beauty of nature listening to music, dancing.

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Some patients believe they can cure cancer with prayer or other religious activities instead of conventional therapy. Cancer patients who refuse or delay traditional treatment in favor of faith healing can, however, suffer serious health consequences. Despite the documented role of spiritual life in patients' well-being, there is no evidence that faith healing alone can lead to recovery. Issues related to spiritual practices are very personal matters. Not every patient wishes to share them. Thus, healthcare professionals face the difficult task of showing respect for patients'



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spiritual practices while being willing to engage in such discussions or provide adequate support in this regard.

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