

Abstract:

Sister Patricia A. Parachini, D. Min

SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS: CARE AT THE END OF LIFE

The long-term experience and study of many cultures and societies indicate that there is a positive relationship between spirituality and overall health. All people have the same basic spiritual needs, for example, the need for love and relatedness, the need for community, for forgiveness, to be listened to and to be valued, and these take on a new importance in the context of a life-threatening illness. Spiritual care, including a range of activities from specific religious practices, to the use of guided imagery and massage, needs to be integrated into palliative care programs because spiritual care engages the whole person and can have an effect on healing at multiple levels even when a physical cure is not possible.

As the time of death draws near, dying patients have expressed their specific spiritual needs as, the need for warm relationship with their healthcare providers, the need to share fears and concerns, the chance to say goodbye, the need for prayer and not to die alone. For many, religion is the primary means of meeting their spiritual needs. The major religious traditions offer perspective about life and death, illness and suffering and use sacred texts, prayers and rituals to comfort the dying. As major participants in the spiritual care of their dying patients, healthcare professionals need to listen, observe and learn from them in order to provide them with care that is both compassionate and uniquely adapted to their patients' needs.