

Unpacking Characteristics of Spirituality: Through the Lens of Persons of Color Living with Serious Illness

The domain of Spiritual, Religious, & Existential Care is one of official domains of Palliative Nursing. There is also a NANDA-I diagnosis for spiritual distress, related to difficulty creating existential meaning. Spiritual support enhances a patient's well-being and leads to improved healing, while spiritual distress can interfere with healing. However, research and education in this domain of nursing is severely lacking. Using a secondary data set of narrative interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted on interviews with 20 patients of color with serious illness. A schema was created based on a broad definition of spirituality, including: Religion, Self, Family, Community, Nature, and Art/Music/Literature, and the research team worked to arrive at consensus on the final themes. The three primary themes expressed were Religion, Self, and Family. Patients noted three main effects on their religious life: increased faith, a stronger sense of purpose, and the importance of being prayed for. In the theme of self, statements were made about self-worth, awareness of their life in a larger context, and reflection on their personality characteristics. Serious illness increased their feeling of value in the world and influenced what they valued in their lives. Participants reflected that family added existential meaning and purpose to their lives. Minor themes expressed by participants included Community, Nature, and Art/Music. Nurses must understand the broad range of experiences encompassed by the spiritual domain in order to be effective spiritual care generalists. Nurses must address the patient's spiritual life by building on skills such as compassion and active listening in addition to learning to identify spiritual needs, notice signs of spiritual distress, and knowing when to refer to the spiritual specialist, the chaplain. Nurses must be educated to anticipate these needs, enabling their patients to have healing despite physiological illness.