

# Palliative Care of the Human Spirit

Linda Pribble M.A., BCC, OFS

# **Disclosure Statement**

**I have no financial disclosures to share. My presentation has been reviewed to ensure no commercial bias.**

# Session Objectives

- 1. Describe the purpose of spiritual care and the Chaplain's role.**
- 2. Identify indicators of spiritual pain.**
- 3. Recognize ways to address and support "soul-full-ness".**
- 4. Define palliative care team roles in spirituality.**

# The Purpose of Spiritual Care

- **“Spirituality is a dynamic, intrinsic aspect of humanity, through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, transcendence and the sacred. Spirituality is practiced through beliefs, values, traditions and practices.”**

• - The Global Network for Spirituality and Health

# More about Spirituality

- "There is an inner room, into which we scarcely ever enter. It is the ground or substance of the soul, where all of the faculties have their roots, and which is the very center of our being. It is here that the soul is at all times in direct contact with God." - "The Golden String" Bede Griffiths
- "Encoded in our DNA is the Soul's Code, the spiritual power thrust behind evolution, consciousness". - Thomas Berry, Spiritual-Ecology Activist
- "Soul and Body together form one unique human nature. Each human soul is individual, immortal, immediately created by God."  
- "Catechism of the Catholic Church"

# "Soul's Source" Descriptions

- **"The Something more"** - William James, Father of Western Psychology
- **"The Everything"** - Gnostic Scriptures
- **"The One in All, Breath of Life"** - Hebrew Scriptures
- **"Higher Power"** - Alcoholic Anonymous
- **"Creator"** - Native American
- **"God, Christ, Allah, Brahmin,"** - World Religions

# "Soul" Descriptors"

- "Within"
- "The Self"
- "Home"
- " True Self"
- "The Real"
- "Authentic Self"

# Purpose of Spiritual Care

- To accompany patients on *their journey*. To help, connect them with what is most alive within.
- To help patients and their loved ones *find their own* internal sense of meaning and purpose, comfort, strength and wholeness.



# Chaplain's Role

- **Accompanying the patient on their journey, being present.**
- **Helping the patient connect with what is most alive in them.**
- **Encouraging spiritual curiosity and reflection.**
- **Connecting the patient with their spiritual community.**
- **Integrating the spiritual assessment & treatment plan into the patient's "Plan of Care".**

# Spiritual Pain

- **"Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning."** - Victor Frankl, M.D. Holocaust Survivor
- **"Illness is often the place of brokenness, of forgetting our intrinsic wholeness."** - Linda Pribble, BCC, Chaplain

# Spiritual Distress

- **"I am not at home in my home"** - "Tent Mender, Netflix
- **Impaired ability to experience & integrate meaning & purpose.**
- **Lack of connectedness with self, others, the transcendent the sacred.**
- **Deep pain in the psyche/soul.**

# Diagnosing Spiritual Distress

1. Inability to make meaning: *"I am not the person I used to be".*
2. Conflicted between deeply held beliefs, values and life events :  
*"Why me? Why now?... "What'll happen to me when I die?"*
3. Inability to give or receive forgiveness: *"I raised her, but she'll never forgive me for divorcing her Father".*
4. Loss of hope, lack of feeling loved and cared about: *"I've been sick so long, what do I have to look forward to? I have no one".*
5. Isolation: *"My wife died and my entire family is gone. I am so alone...where is God?"*

# Spiritual Pain

- **Depression/Existential despair**
- **Anxiety**
- **Chronic pain**
- **Guilt/Blame**
- **Loss of Control/loss of freedom**
- **Addiction**
- **Suicidality**

# Spiritual Distress

Spiritual pain can be a secondary cause to a presenting psychological or physical diagnosis.

# Spiritual Distress-Clinical Case

**Mary Andrews is a divorced 65-year-old woman. She retired to Las Cruces, New Mexico, three years ago. Mary moved from Boston after retiring from a career as a successful accountant. She has been estranged from her daughter for five years.**

**Mary was diagnosed with lung cancer two years ago, before being referred to palliative care. She wants to continue her chemotherapy. Mary's cancer has progressed slowly. Although her respiratory symptoms and pain are well controlled, she struggles with dependency, fatigue and depression. She doesn't understand why God allowed her to become so ill? She worries about the rift with her daughter. She wonders, "Where is God? Will I be alone when I die?"**

# Questions for Discussion

1. What is Mary's spiritual distress?
2. What is important at this point in Mary's story?
3. What would you do as a team member on this palliative care team?



# What is Soul-full-ness?

- **The ability to experience and integrate meaning and purpose in life through connectedness with: self, others, higher power, beauty in art and nature.**
- **Waking up to the inner-stirrings of the soul and one's purpose.**
- **Affirmation of life and spiritual well-being as being connected with God, self and community.**

# How we as Clinicians address Soul-full-ness

- **"Sometimes I can't fix it or make it all better. But I can visit, show up ready to listen deeply. Being a faithful presence matters more than you may think, because...in the end, we are meant to accompany each other home."** - Sr. Eileen McNerney, Orange, California
- **"Perhaps our best work as health professionals is not about something "we do" but about something "we are". Perhaps in our presence our patients can proceed, less afraid".** Dr. Puchalski
- **"How are you within?"** - Dame Cicely Saunders, Founder of Modern Day Hospice Movement

# Soul-full tool for encounters with self/patient

## Awareness

- **How current are you with your soul?**
- **What might your soul be saying to you?**
- **What do you think your soul is holding?**
- **What might be calling out to be released in you?**

# Emptying Process

- **Breathing in/out thoughts, feelings, patient needs etc.**
- **Releasing all these concerns to the Source of your soul.**

# Filling Process

- **Breathing in/out**
- **Filling with a gratitude, prayer, affirmation, mantra, visualization.**

# Recommendations for Soul-full-ness

- **Remember: Practice acceptance, there are things in the patient's life that you cannot fix or make all better.**
- **Remember: The patient you are visiting, no matter how debilitated, has lived a vibrant life and that life is still vital within them.**
- **Remember: We and our patients are already on sacred ground. Become willing to listen and wonder together.**
- **Remember: Listen more, talk less and connect with your eyes and heart.**
- **Remember: A listening and caring presence is the sacred gift you can give.**

# Questions leading to a Real Conversation

- 1. How are you within right now?**
- 2. What matters to you?**
- 3. Who or what do you trust?**

# Summary

- **The best way to support a patient's soul, begins with making a connection with our own.**
- **"When we come from the ground of our own being, everything that comes from that place is alive." -Meister Eckhart**
- **It's all about connecting. Connecting with ourselves and the God of our understanding. Helping the patient to connect with themselves.**



# Palliative Care Team Members & Spirituality

- **Social Worker**
- **Nurse**
- **Pharmacist**
- **Chaplain**
- **Physician**
- **CNA**

**Each person brings a unique perspective and narrative about the patient/family. The team together brings a fuller (wholistic) patient story to the Plan of Care.**

# Summary

- **Palliative Care is a whole-person focus: Body, Mind and Spirit.**
- **Soul care addresses that which lives in the innermost being of persons.**
- **Remember when you meet any patient, you are standing on Holy Ground.**

# Resources

- **The Global Network for Spirituality & Health**
- **“Tent Mender” Netflix Documentary**
- **“Poetry of Presence, Anthology of Mindfulness Poems”**
- **CSU Shiley Institute for Palliative Care**
- **Las Cruces Palliative Care Coalition**
- **Center to Advance Palliative Care**
- **The Center for Non-Violent Communications/ Albuquerque**
- **Center for Action and Contemplation/Albuquerque**