Screening the Spiritual Needs of Palliative Patients, their Families and Caregivers

What is the purpose of this Spiritual Care Screening Tool?

Any health care provider can use this tool to complete a quick and simple spiritual screening of patients, families and caregivers requiring a palliative approach to care.

When can it be used?

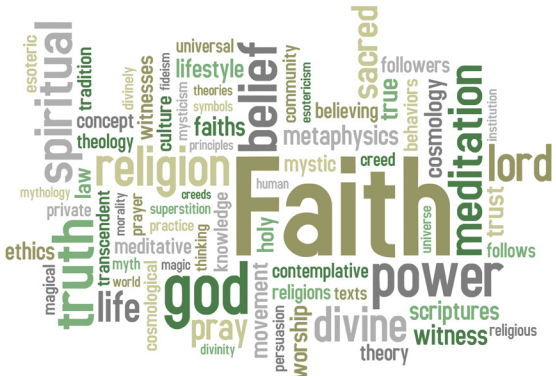
It can be used at any point in a patient's initial, ongoing and transitional plan of care.

Why should it be used?

Left untreated, spiritual distress can manifest in physical, emotional or psychological conditions, including physical pain, anxiety and depression.

What is Spirituality?

"Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred."[1]



What is Spiritual Distress?

Health care providers can recognize spiritual distress when patients, families and caregivers are:

- Struggling with hopelessness or a loss of faith
- Feeling lonely, forgotten, isolated, guilty or misunderstood
- Experiencing anger at others or a Higher Power
- Questioning the purpose of their life or the meaning of suffering
- Needing forgiveness or reconciliation
- Facing loss or grief

Screening Spiritual Concerns and Struggles

As a health care provider, ask yourself the following questions when screening the spiritual needs of patients, families and caregivers:

- Does the person have hopes and dreams that have been threatened by this illness?
- Is the person struggling with pain, suffering, abandonment, despair, fear, anger or guilt?
- Is the person stating, "I feel useless." or, "I'm scared." or, "Why me?"
- Does the person talk about being "spiritual" or "religious" and/or wanting spiritual rituals, symbols or practices?
- If your answer to any of these questions is "Yes," then the patient, family member and/or caregiver may need support from a qualified Spiritual Care Provider.

Spiritual Care Referrals

Contact the Spiritual Care Provider at your organization when a referral for spiritual support is needed.

What Do Spiritual Care Providers Offer?

Spiritual Care Providers offer support to patients, families and caregivers through all phases of palliative and end-of-life care. Their treatment plans could include but are not limited to:

- Exploring and addressing spiritual concerns or struggles to promote coping and spiritual well-being.
- Providing supportive counseling to identify personal sources of strength, meaning and hope.
- Facilitating spiritual/religious rituals, rites or practices.
- Identifying and engaging community resources that support the patient/family spiritually.
- Assisting with end-of-life perceptions and planning.
- Supporting patient/family in understanding and dealing with anticipatory grief.

Waterloo Wellington
Integrated Hospice
Palliative Care

To download a PDF copy of this screening tool, please visit www.wwpalliativecare.ca

[1] Christina Puchalski et al., "Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care: The Report of the Consensus Conference," Journal of Palliative Medicine 12, no. 10 (2009): 891.