

CANCER SURVIVORS

SYMPOSIA SERIES II

Issues & Solutions for Life After Cancer

Healing the Spirit After Cancer

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Part II

Healing the Spirit After Cancer

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Dr. Tuck is a professor at the VCU School of Nursing, teaching spirituality in nursing and healthcare. Her research focuses on the role of spirituality on healing and health. For the last ten years, she has developed a spiritual intervention for people with chronic disease, and is currently working on a spiritual intervention for women with breast cancer.

Spirituality is an area of nursing and the healing disciplines that has expanded tremendously in the last 10-15 years. The amount of writing on this topic has grown immensely. Here are several definitions of spirituality that can be found in these writings that capture some of the ideals used by Dr. Tuck in her work:

- “Spirituality is a basic phenomenon that helps create meaning in the world.” (Sumner, 1998)
- “Spirituality is a combination of a sense of well-being in relation to God and a sense of life purpose and life satisfactions. It encompasses the search for transcendence, purpose, hardiness, serenity, peace, connection and hope.” (Moberg, 1998)
- “Spirituality is described as holistic, multidimensional, humanistic phenomenon that transcends the physical, social, and psychological being. Meaning, purpose and mission in life are components of and are consistent themes in spirituality.” (Walton, 1996)
- “Spirituality is a relationship or connectedness with self, others, nature, and Ultimate other.” (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen & Stollenwerk, 1989)

Dr. Tuck’s definition of spirituality is as follows:

- “Spirituality is the outward manifestations of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that allows meaning-making, peace, hope and connectedness with self, others, nature and God or a higher power.”

One of the challenges in doing research in the area of spirituality is that for many people, particularly in the southern culture, spirituality equals religion. For some, there is no distinction between religion and spirituality. But for others, there is a more secular view. Some say that spirituality has nothing to do with their religion, or is far greater than their religion. All of these definitions are valid and must be taken into consideration when looking at research. An individual defines the nature of their own spirituality.

According to the most recent Gallop poll, spirituality is very important, particularly in this culture. 95% of Americans believe in God or a higher power. 82% of Americans desire to experience spiritual growth. 85% of Americans pray daily as a spiritual intervention.

What is the significance for these numbers in terms of cancer research or cancer survivorship?

- One study showed that 85% use a complimentary or alternative method of treatment and 88% found spiritual or religious practices helped them cope with their cancer.
- Another study looked at 772 physicians and found that 16% recommended guided imagery, 48% recommended meditation and 27% some movement therapy (yoga, t'ai chi, etc) as adjuvant treatment to chemotherapy and other medical treatments.
- Studies have documented that physical health and psychological outcomes are increased when there is prayer, meditation, guided imagery, or some kind of movement therapy along with the cancer treatment.

For the past ten years, Dr. Tuck has focused her research on healing and spirituality. Healing is differentiated from curing in that it is unrelated to disease and symptom management. Using Dr. Tuck's definition, a person with a terminal illness can be healed.

Dr. Tuck uses a model that presents the individual as a holistic interaction of mind, body and spirit. Therefore, any life experience affects not just one, but all three of these components. Using this model, when one is faced with a cancer diagnosis, it is a significant experience psychologically, physically and spiritually. Some of her key assumptions follow:

- Spirituality comes into conscious awareness through reflecting, sensing, sharing, meditating, being open and exploring, attending apprehending a or some type of introspective activity.
 - Reading inspirational materials, communing with nature, the act of forgiveness can all help spirituality come into our consciousness.
- Sharing in a communal way deepens one's understanding of spirituality.
 - Healing can happen through storytelling (telling your story to others) by allowing the translation of distress into language that ultimately allows us to forget or move beyond the experience.

- Spirituality allows one to transcend pain and suffering.
 - Pain and suffering can be transcended through creative expression of spirituality.
 - One of Dr. Tuck's research groups allows people to draw a spiritual scene of something that is meaningful to them. The analysis on the drawings has shown that there is not much variability between the drawings of individuals with an illness and those that were healthy. The representations of spirituality were similar.

Strategies to promote healing include:

- Quiet reflection and meditation.
 - There are physiological results of meditating—blood pressure changes, pulse rates change, minds stop racing
- Prayers—can be prayers of petitions, intercessory prayers where you pray for the well-being of others, centering prayers, which is a combination of praying and meditating
- Reading spiritual or religious materials
- Appreciating the spirit through using your senses—nature, good food, music, sex, anything that allows you experience a sense of joy.
- Worship—people who attend church regularly have more positive outcomes than those who do not. Places of worship also offer opportunities for communal sharing.
- Journaling
- Movement and physical activity
- Daily affirmations
- Experience of nature and outdoors
- Creative expression --drawings, poetry, dance, stories, music