Spiritual Care of the Elderly

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Topics

• Two Case Examples
• A Few Interesting Stats
• A Condensed Spiritual Profile of Aging
• Basic Overview of Spiritual Care
• Starter Ideas for Relevance to The Centers for Health & Aging
• Three “Must have” Resources
Case Example

• Male, age 79
• Inpatient 1 East
• “failure to thrive”
96% of Americans believe in God/Spirit; 90% pray; 70% church

9 out of 10 older adults: religion important. Most say religion helps them cope/gives meaning to life

Church once/week: live longer

Predictors of elderly happiness: health, faith, spouse
Studies & Public Policy

• Broadest systematic review to date: preponderant relationship between greater religious involvement and better mental/physical health, or lower use of health services.
  (325+ studies on religion/physical health plus nearly 800 on mental health — Koenig, McCullough, Larson, 2000)

• White House Conferences on Aging 1971: asks government provide research, education and pay to have spiritual needs of elderly met.
Bottom Line

• Religion/Spirituality integral dimensions of healthy aging for most; plays important part in making sense of life

• Concept of spirituality is now integral part of health and well-being. Awareness of impact of spirituality on healing has grown significantly over past several decades.
### Spiritual Profile of Aging

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>Integrating Loss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worry / Anxiety</td>
<td>Peace</td>
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<td>Loneliness / Isolation</td>
<td>Healthy Relation</td>
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<td>Misery / Despair</td>
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<td>Resentment/Alienation</td>
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<td>End of Life Issues</td>
<td>Coming to Terms</td>
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Spiritual Care

Care for spirit of an individual characterized by non-judgmental, skilled listening and supportive relationship, offering safe space to untangle unrest, process life issues, and tap into inner resources.
What Spiritual Care Looks Like

• **Assessment**
  Identifying spiritual distress, needs, attitudes and strengths using modalities that obtain information.

• **Interventions**
  Activities to strengthen inner resources and address well-being in spiritual and other life domains.
What Spiritual Care Looks Like

• **Collaboration**
  Charting and collaboration with medical care team. Ongoing evaluation of Spiritual Care Plan.

• **Follow-up**
  Ongoing care.
Case Example

- Female, age 82
- Nursing home resident
- “wicked pain”
Possible Outcomes

- Positive adjustment to change
- Resolution of old and ongoing grief, hurt, loss
- Evidence of increased well being
- Interest in others
- Participation in life
- Happiness / peace
- Ability to achieve satisfaction’
- Relief from depression
- Reduction in medications / sickness
- Positive effects on family
- Valuable input to medical care team
So ....

With 9 out of 10 older adults saying religion is important ... with most saying it helps them cope ... with the overwhelming conflux of challenges to the spirits of this population ... and with all we know about the power of belief in motivation ... how can we not include care of the spirit in the work of The Centers for Health & Aging?
Starter Ideas
for The Centers for Health & Aging

• **Education & Training**
  Geriatric spiritual care training for medical students, interns, nursing staff. Outreach skill building workshops for caregivers, involved community groups.

• **Clinical Services**
  Spiritual assessment included in routine care. Outpatient and home spiritual care visit initiatives.

• **Research**
  Pilots on all initiatives mentioned above. Community spiritual care pilots in outpatient care, with senior centers, senior residences, assisted care/nursing home staff/residents.
Resources

