Communication Skills for Spiritual Conversations

1. What is Spirituality:
   Spirituality is broadly defined as that which gives meaning and purpose in one’s life. (pg. 4, Puchalski and Ferrell)

2. Spiritual Conversations begin by being in relationship with a person. What is involved in being in a relationship?
   - Being authentic
   - Being curious rather than judgmental
   - Caring about the person, as person

3. Storytelling: Let the patient tell his or her story. Often in a person’s story, you will hear what is most important to that person, what is weighing on one’s heart, and or how the person is understanding and or coping with what is going on.

4. Non-verbal Communication: Pay attention to non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice. People say a great deal without using words. Also, watch for inconsistencies between what is being said and a person’s expressions.

5. Use Empathy: Empathy begins by imagining yourself in another’s situation (as much as one can). Listen for feeling words from the speaker. As much as you can, feel the patient’s feelings and communicate that you feel that person’s feelings.

6. Use Active Listening: Active listening involves responding to what another person is saying by sharing what you have heard. As you shared include the non-verbal communication as well as the content of what you have heard.

7. Listen for...: In spiritual conversations, you want to listen for how a person is making sense out of what is going on in his/her life. The person may need to just tell you what has been going on. The person may be recognizing the impact of certain on events on his/her life. The person may be figuring out how he/she is going to cope with what has been going on. The person may be at a point of developing meaning and purpose as they engage an event. All of this may be part of a person’s spiritual process.

8. Spiritual Care is being willing to enter into relationship with the patient and allowing the patient to have an impact on you. It involves listening to a person’s story with respect, empathy and thoughtfulness. Responding with kind and thoughtful words is the basis of spiritual care. There may be times that you recognize greater confusion, uncertainty, anger, etc. that could be signs of distress and may need a referral to a chaplain.