Spiritual Distress

Stress is often part of a patient’s experience with illness. It is normal. Patients usually have ways that they cope with their stress. As they use their ways of coping, the stress is often managed.

Spiritual Distress is more complicated. With Spiritual Distress, the patient is often experiencing that his/her regular ways of coping are not working in that situation as they expected. They seem unable to manage the situation and can feel hopeless, forgotten, angry, etc.

Some Characteristics of Spiritual Distress are...

- Questions meaning and purpose of life and death and/or belief systems...beliefs that made sense if the past, don’t make sense in the same way.
- Expresses conflict about beliefs, concerns about relationship with God, deity, higher power, may feel abandoned or forgotten by God
- Recognizes moral and ethical implications of medical care, feels caught between two important aspects of life
- Increased nightmares or sleep disturbances.
- Lack of self-acceptance.
- Increase in self-blame, over emphasizes the impact his/her choices have on the illness
- Excessive anger and other strong feelings
- Questions meaning of suffering, seems to stay in the place of suffering
- Questions meaning for own existence.
- Seeks spiritual assistance.
- Unable to choose/or chooses not to participate in usual religious practices.
- Displacement of anger toward religious representatives, towards staff, towards family and friends.
- Regards illness as punishment.
- Denies responsibilities for problems.
- Alteration in behavior or mood evidenced by anger, crying, withdrawal, preoccupation, anxiety, hostility, apathy, etc.