

# **A Time for Renewal: Understanding Spiritual Distress and Addressing the Spiritual Needs of Self and Others**

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# **A Time for Renewal: Meeting the Spiritual Needs of Self, Team and Patients**

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## **Disclosure**

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## **Commercial Support**

There is no commercial support for this activity

# Learning Objectives

- Recognize the signs of spiritual distress in self and in others
- Explore the impact of spiritual distress on workplace safety for the caregiver and on patient safety outcomes.
- Describe spiritual care interventions and the importance of practicing spiritual care interventions.

# Post Covid Healthcare:

“We are the wounded healers - called to recognize the sufferings in our own hearts and make that recognition the starting point for our healing.

We also need to carefully address the spiritual needs of our teams and colleagues”

Philip Joseph D Sarmiento, PhD  
2020 Journal of Public Health

# Trained to Self-Sacrifice

- Healthcare has created an environment of sacrificing our own health to get the job done
- Healthcare training sets the tone for this belief
- **We must move away from the idea that we should “self-sacrifice”**

**“First, do no harm”**

# **Self-sacrifice can lead to spiritual distress**

# Exploring Spirit

**Spirit:** The core of ones being or inner self; connected to something bigger than ourselves

- Highly personal
- Where one finds hope and meaning in life
- A broader concept than religion

**Religion is an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods**

**Spiritual care is a basic human need**

# Spiritual Distress

**Spiritual Distress:** is the impaired ability to experience and integrate meaning and purpose in life through being connected to something bigger than ourselves

**There is a link between insufficient self-care and spiritual distress**



# Impact of Spiritual Distress

## *On Individuals:*

- results in exhaustion and compassion fatigue
- leads to a lack of professional satisfaction or fulfillment
- Impact on SAFETY, especially in the healthcare setting.
- If you are not practicing self-care, you may be experiencing specific signs of spiritual distress.

# Impact of Spiritual Distress

## *On Healthcare System*

- Leaving the profession
- Increased workplace injuries and illnesses
- Poor work/life balance
- Healthcare workers have historically been at a disproportionate risk of suicide.

Physician Suicide July 13, 2022, Louise B Andrew, MD, JD  
<https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/806779-overview#a1>

# Signs of spiritual distress in individuals

- Tired, difficulty sleeping; nightmares, insomnia
- Struggling to focus
- Feeling stressed, depressed, anxious
- Lacking motivation to continue caring
- Poor appetite and/or poor diet
- Finding no joy in anything
- Expressing negative thoughts or feelings
- Withdrawing from usual interactions/activities

***Not just an individual issue...***

# Signs of spiritual distress in others

- Withdrawal from group conversations or activities
- Rarely asks for help, rarely offers help, unavailable
- Verbalizes lack of joy, lack of caring
- Verbalizes negative perceptions of patients/coworkers.
- Snide or abrupt remarks.

***Spiritual distress is “contagious”***

# Making a Choice

“If you do not make time for  
your wellness,  
you will be forced to make  
time for your illness.”

Joyce Sunada, Wellness Coach

## Fact:

There are several methods to prevent and heal spiritual distress through self care practices

# Healing our Spiritual Distress

- *Care of self*: Deliberate expenditure of energy and time to care for my spirit
- *Care of others*: Incorporating intentional care of the spirit of those around me, without sacrificing myself

# Care of Self

- Intentional Rest
- Personal Self-Care
- Mindfulness





# Intentional Rest Includes:

- Sacred self time

  - REST is not just sleep; it includes sleep

  - For your body: movement, mindful eating

  - For your mind: meditation, reading, good movies

  - For your spirit: fun, spiritual practices

- Sacred mealtime

  - Scheduled meal, with family or friends gathered around.

  - No electronics

- Sacred family time

  - The ones we are given and the ones we choose

# Intentional Personal Care Includes:

1. Permission to do something just for fun
2. Paying attention to my own needs
3. Allowing myself to say no to obligations
4. Taking a nap
5. Taking a walk-in nature
6. Quality time with family, friends, or alone

Barron Hall, S. (2022)

# Mindfulness

- the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment
- intentionally experiencing what is going on around you . . . .

**AND its effect on you.**

**“Mindfulness helps unify mind, body, and spirit to what is happening right now.”**

(Watson, Sitzman, 2018)

# Care of Others

- Acknowledgement
- Gratitude
- Attitude of acceptance
- Establishing trust and empathy
- Therapeutic communication
- Refer to spiritual care specialists



# Lovingkindness

Practice lovingkindness toward self:

- I love you no matter what. I am committed to you. I will not diminish you. I will not judge you. AND I WILL NOT SACRIFICE YOU. **Covenantal loyalty.**

Practicing lovingkindness toward the team:

- I am committed to our work. I will not diminish or judge you. I will not sacrifice the health of our team.

Practicing lovingkindness toward the patients and their families:

- I am committed to your care. I will not diminish or judge you. I will not sacrifice your dignity.

# Barriers to Spiritual Care

There is ineffective recognition of spiritual distress

There is stigma associated with acknowledging our own mental health needs and mental health issues

We need to practice our own spiritual care

Catherine Florio Pipas, MD, MPH *Caring for Me is Caring for You: The Power of Physician Self-Care and Personal Transformation.*

# What's Next?

- Schedule sacred time for yourself
- Determine a method for measuring your own wellness
- Being aware of barriers to self care
- Normalize and prioritize self care activities for yourself and others
- Set aside a sacred time in your team meetings to check in with each other about this topic
- It starts with YOU

# It is sacred work





# Questions or comments

To schedule a presentation  
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