



## Healing the Body and Soul: A Comprehensive Review of Spiritual Nursing Care

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Spiritual care is an important aspect of patient centered care and in healthcare research, the focus on spiritual care has been growing over the past decades. Providing spiritual care in a global, culturally entwined, and pluralistic world is complicated, as providers are sensitive to the potential variance in the secular, spiritual, and religious meaning orientations of their patients. The purpose of spiritual nursing care is to support people's spiritual health, encourage inner serenity, offer emotional support, and assist them in using their spiritual resources to get through trying times. **Purpose:** To identify challenges nurses face (communication, sensitivity) for improvement. **Methods:** In this study, we estimated ten patients from a geriatric ward in Edinburgh, Scotland, who were asked to define their spiritual requirements. **Results:** In our study, the majority of the patients expressed a desire to make sense of or find purpose in their lives, as well as to be loved and accepted. **Conclusion:** The study provides theoretical research and empirical support for nursing, creating a cumulative added value in spiritual nursing care. Future studies on spiritual care in nursing should inform changes in education and practice. This patient requirement must be prioritized alongside all other physical and mental needs. **Implications for Nursing:** Spiritual care in nursing practice has the potential to significantly enhance patient well-being and expand the role of nurses in healthcare. By addressing these challenges and fostering better training and education, nurses can become more equipped to integrate spiritual care into their practice.

**Keywords:** Spiritual care, Spiritual well-being, Spiritual interventions, Nursing care, Holistic care, Spiritual health.

### What does this paper add?

1. This paper likely contributes to the field by comprehensively reviewing existing research on spiritual nursing care, where the paper offers a consolidated overview of the topic. This can be helpful for nurses and healthcare professionals seeking to understand the current state of knowledge in this area.
2. The paper doesn't just discuss spiritual care; it emphasizes the potential benefits it holds for both patients (improved coping, reduced anxiety, higher satisfaction) and nurses (expanded scope of practice, well-rounded skillset). This dual focus can encourage wider adoption of spiritual care practices.
3. The paper acknowledges challenges nurses face in initiating spiritual conversations and the need for cultural sensitivity. This highlights areas where further education and training can be implemented to strengthen the practice of spiritual care. By pointing out the need for more research on the link between spiritual care and health outcomes, the paper paves the way for future studies that can solidify the evidence base for this aspect of nursing care.
4. Overall, the paper likely serves as a valuable resource for nurses and healthcare professionals by summarizing existing knowledge, highlighting

potential benefits, acknowledging challenges, and calling for further research in spiritual nursing care.

### **Introduction**

Spiritual care refers to the support and assistance provided to individuals to address their spiritual needs, beliefs, and values as they navigate through challenging life situations, including illness, loss, and other struggles. It entails acknowledging and honoring each person's distinct spiritual viewpoint and providing support, consolation, and tools to enable them to derive meaning, direction, and comfort from their experiences.

A key component of patient-centered care is spiritual care, and during the past few decades, spiritual care has received more attention in healthcare studies. It is challenging to deliver spiritual care in a multicultural, globalized, and pluralistic world because healthcare professionals must be aware of potential differences in their patients' secular, spiritual, and religious meaning orientations.

Depending on the beliefs and desires of the individual, spiritual care can take many different forms. It might include religious rites and practices like prayer, but it can also include non-religious pursuits like introspection, meditation, and talks about existential issues and principles. The purpose of spiritual nursing care is to support people's spiritual health, encourage inner serenity, offer emotional support, and assist them in using their spiritual resources to get through trying times.

### **The Importance of Addressing Spiritual Health**

According to the World Health Organization (2021), health encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being, rather than only the absence of sickness or disability. This definition encompasses spiritual health in order to maximize mental and social welfare. To provide the greatest possible patient care, nurses must develop both preventive and restorative interventions that address all three categories defined by the World Health Organization's criteria. Historically, nursing theorists highlighted the need of meeting patients' spiritual needs. Many professional organizations support the need for spiritual care.

A spiritual assessment that covers the client's relationship with God, meaning and purpose in life, religious affiliation, and any other significant beliefs is one of the nursing interventions offered by the North

American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA). Other nursing interventions include encouraging the clients to pray and setting an example by praying with and for them, as well as validating their concerns and showing respect for their beliefs (Ackley & Ladwig, 2016).

Nurses should "maximize the values that the patient has treasured in life," according to the American Nurses Association's code of ethics, and "the measures nurses take to care for the patient enable the patient to live with as much physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being as possible" (2023: 4). The Joint Commission on Accreditation for Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) mandates that all patients undergo a spiritual assessment and should be provided with spiritual support, acknowledging the significance of spiritual care.

Regarding instruction, nursing students should be taught how to comprehend the effects that spirituality has on healing and health, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. The majority of nursing textbooks don't cover this topic very much, despite the fact that most prominent professional organizations discuss how important it is to provide spiritual care. Patients and their families may try to establish causalities or find meaning and purpose for their condition as they cope with stress, loss, suffering, obstacles, and even death. Hospital stays can lead to either a complete loss of hope and faith or a deepening of one's spirituality. The nurse's response at this crucial moment is vitally important (Frisch, 2019).

Spiritual health is an essential aspect of overall well-being that encompasses the values, relationships, and meaning and purpose of our lives. While there may not be a comprehensive definition agreed upon by experts, addressing spiritual health is recognized as crucial for several reasons. Numerous studies have shown that spiritual health can contribute to positive health outcomes. It has been associated with improved quality of life, better coping mechanisms, and enhanced overall well-being. Taking care of our spiritual health allows us to adopt a holistic approach to our well-being. When we are spiritually healthy, we feel more connected to a higher power and to those around us. This connection can provide clarity in decision-making and align our actions with our beliefs and values. Maintaining spiritual health can help individuals cope with various challenges, including chronic illnesses. It provides a source of inner strength, comfort, and peace, which can

support individuals in managing physical health issues and promoting healing. Engaging in spiritual practices, such as attending religious services or participating in meditation groups, can provide social support. This sense of belonging, security, and community has been linked to increased well-being and improved health outcomes. Patient-centered Care: Recognizing the importance of spirituality in patient care is crucial. Incorporating spiritual aspects into healthcare can lead to more patient-centered care and better outcomes. It involves addressing patients' spiritual beliefs, providing opportunities for spiritual expression, and collaborating with chaplains or spiritual care providers when appropriate. It's important to note that spirituality is a personal and individual experience, and what works for one person may not work for another. Therefore, it's essential to identify the things in your life that give you a sense of inner peace, comfort, strength, love, and connection, and incorporate them into your spiritual practices.

Spiritual nursing care focuses on the "whole person," recognizing that illness can impact a patient's spirit alongside his/her physical and emotional well-being (Fiona & Silvia, 2016). Three key concepts guide this care: spiritual assessment, spiritual interventions, and holistic integration. Firstly, a spiritual assessment involves open-ended questions and observations to understand a patient's values, beliefs, and sources of comfort. Secondly, spiritual interventions encompass actions that support these needs, like facilitating religious practices, fostering connections with loved ones, or simply offering a listening ear. Finally, holistic integration ensures that spiritual care is seamlessly woven into all aspects of a patient's treatment plan, creating a truly comprehensive approach to healing (Fiona & Silvia, 2016).

### **Review of Literature**

Spiritual nursing care dives into the realm of a patient's well-being beyond the physical aspect. This review explores what the literature reveals about this growing aspect of holistic nursing practice. Studies highlight the significance of spirituality in nursing. The concept of "holistic care" emphasizes that a person is more than just his/her physical body. Spirituality encompasses a patient's beliefs, values, and connection to a higher power or purpose in life. Research suggests that incorporating spiritual care into nursing practice

leads to positive results for both patients and nurses. Patients may experience enhanced healing, improved psychological adjustment, and a greater sense of well-being. Nurses who deliver spiritual care often report increased job satisfaction. A recurring theme is the need for improved training for nurses in spiritual care. Many studies report that nurses feel inadequately equipped to address patients' spiritual needs. Additionally, navigating the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of patients presents a challenge that necessitates ongoing education for nurses. The literature points to the growing importance of spiritual care in nursing. By addressing the educational needs of nurses and fostering open communication with patients, nurses can provide more comprehensive and holistic care. This review provides a starting point for a deeper dive into spiritual nursing care like specific strategies and techniques for nurses to deliver spiritual care, the impact of spiritual care on specific patient populations and ethical considerations in spiritual care. By continuing to research and develop spiritual care practices, nurses can empower patients to find strength and meaning throughout their healthcare journey.

### **Analysis of a Patient's Spiritual Needs**

Analyzing a patient's spiritual needs goes beyond religious practices. It's about understanding his/her search for meaning and purpose in life, especially when illness challenges those very concepts. Patients might grapple with existential questions, yearn for connection, or seek hope. By asking open-ended questions, observing their demeanor, and respecting their unique beliefs, healthcare professionals can uncover these spiritual needs. Addressing them can be a powerful tool to enhance coping mechanisms, promote peace, and contribute to a patient's overall well-being during his/her healing journey. Renowned psychologist and pastoral care specialist Howard Clinebell recognized seven basic spiritual needs that people have. These needs include the experience of trust, self-worth, hope, joy, and the love of life, as well as the healing and empowering of love. Emotional wounds like grief, guilt, resentment, and shame can be healed with the support of spiritual needs. They also support feeling fulfilled, growing personally, and accepting oneself. A sense of connection is necessary for spiritual needs, whether that connection is with a higher power, oneself, other people, or the environment. This relationship gives life purpose,

support, and a sense of belonging. The search for meaning and purpose in life is intimately related to spiritual demands. These entail looking for meaning and fulfillment in life as well as answers to existential issues.

The need for transcendence, for going beyond oneself, and for experiencing beauty in its many manifestations are all considered spiritual desires. Appreciating the wonders of the world, art, and nature are a few examples. Spiritual pain may result from unfulfilled spiritual demands. This may show up as a disruption in one's spiritual condition and be a factor in emotional and psychological difficulties. In medical settings, identifying and meeting spiritual needs is crucial. To ascertain patients' spiritual requirements and whether they are in spiritual distress, a number of formal assessment instruments are available. When it comes to providing spiritual care and directing patients to spiritual support personnel when needed, nurses and other healthcare professionals can be extremely helpful (Fiona & Silvia, 2016).

A nurse's first step in addressing a patient's spiritual needs must always be an assessment. This can be accomplished informally by interacting with the patient and his or her family, or formally through nursing research; in any case, the nurse must always act with impartiality and respect. While some nurses have acknowledged that they are uneasy or unprepared to discuss religious or spiritual matters with their patients, it is advised that the topic of spiritual care be approached methodically (Fiona & Silvia, 2016). While some nurses advocate waiting to perform a spiritual evaluation until after the nurse and patient have built rapport, others suggested adding one within the initial assessment at the start of each shift. Depending on the patient, the nurse should apply his/her own judgment to decide which strategy is most suited. To illuminate the patient's beliefs that can influence his/her care is the aim of spiritual assessment (Loustalot, 2008).

### **Methods and Results**

Simple, open-ended questions demonstrate the nurse's readiness to assist and allow the patient to express his/her concerns. Some patients believe that nurses and physicians are just concerned with providing physical care and will avoid discussing spirituality with hospital professionals outside the chaplaincy. The start of a spiritual discussion may allow the patient to feel more comfortable talking to nurses about this crucial

aspect of his/her health. A study of 15 chronically ill individuals in the UK found that some feel they must avoid discussing spiritual subjects to risk mockery from healthcare professionals. According to Frisch (2019), patients who see their spirituality and ideas as different from the mainstream community may have this issue. Any information gained from the spiritual assessment can then be used to help, encourage, and guide the patient in connecting with and employing spirituality to improve his/her health and well-being.

Ten patients from a geriatric ward in Edinburgh, Scotland, were asked to define their spiritual requirements. The patients' most prevalent needs were religious in nature. Patients also expressed a desire to make sense of or find purpose in their lives, as well as to be loved and accepted. This study also acknowledged that spiritual demands occur in response to death. This could entail answering questions about life after death, meditating on moral standing and doing the right thing, and fulfilling imagined obligations to one's family. In this study, no patients reported receiving aid from nurses to meet their spiritual requirements. However, nearly 75% of nurses in a similar context claimed detecting spiritual needs. During the session, patients shared hitherto unspoken emotional events from their history. The interviewer offered patients the choice to go on to the next topic if they became angry, but all chose to continue discussing the painful event, indicating that the process was helpful. According to Ross (1997), giving patients access to hospital chapel services, a quiet space for prayer and meditation, and improved communication with hospital chaplains are effective approaches to providing spiritual care.

### **Nursing Interventions to Meet Spiritual Needs**

Active listening, therapeutic touch, establishing trust, and being present are some of the interventions used in this field. The next category that was often discussed focused on supporting religious and spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, scheduling ritualistic requirements like the sacrament administration, and particular dietary considerations. A further intervention in this category entails introducing the patient to the chaplain services offered by the hospital and educating him/her about the availability of further spiritual resources. The third group of interventions is concerned with giving medical care. The physical demands of the patient must be satisfied,

especially in terms of adequate pain control. Therapeutic touch is acknowledged in this category as a means of fostering a relationship with the patient and offering spiritual support. The nurse must exercise extra caution while implementing these interventions in the patient's care to make sure that the patient is receiving support and that the response is sensitive. Five nursing interventions that support patients' spiritual needs were found by Frisch (2019) through a comparison of the needs and interventions of patients, nurses, and chaplains. These practices consist of scripture reading, prayer, presence, listening, and referral. Parish, hospice, and oncology nurses attested to the value of these interventions and noted that they were crucial to provide their patients with a sense of acceptance and hope. Most people understand prayer to be the act of pleading with a higher power to bring about a favorable result. Healing prayer is defined as "bringing oneself and a situation of disease before God with at least one other person to listen, discern, speak, and respond, so that healing in relation to or with God can take place" (O'Brien, 2018). Prayer can take on many different forms. The patient may be encouraged by the nurse to pray alone, but frequently the patient's condition or course of treatment will make it difficult for him/her to pray alone. In these situations, the nurse's prayers—both for the patients and alongside them—may turn into a spiritual care intervention. In the area of spiritual care, the patient's

reality should be reflected in the documented outcomes. It's possible that these outcomes are observed or not.

If the nurse employs this intervention, the patient's prayers should be reflected in the prayer. Simple remarks regarding the patient's needs, hopes, and worries as well as an acknowledgment and plea of God's ability to step in and meet the patient's needs are likely to be included in a therapeutic prayer. In many different circumstances, prayer can bring comfort and serenity to sufferers. Before incorporating prayer into the care plan, the nurse should always get the patient's consent (O'Brien, 2018).

The nurse's simple presence and attentive listening are additional nursing interventions that can assist in meeting the patient's spiritual needs. A lot of people talk about how lonely their hospital stay was. This can be a fantastic holistic intervention if the nurse is in the room, aware of the patient's needs, and willing to stop and listen. Thanks to advancements in medical technology, a nurse can perform the majority of the required monitoring from the patient's doorway, all without ever having to provide direct care. Quality patient care treats the patient, not just the monitor, as nurses should be trained. Nurses can address some of their patients' spiritual needs and provide a channel of communication to identify any further needs the patients may have by being presents with them and showing that they are prepared to actively listen to them (O'Brien, 2018).

**Table 1. Spiritual care interventions in nursing**

Aspect	Description	Interventions
Focus	Provides care that addresses all aspects of a patient's well-being: physical, emotional, social, and spiritual.	A nurse assesses a patient's pain level (physical), anxieties about treatment (emotional), support system at home (social), and religious beliefs (spiritual).
Spiritual Assessment	Evaluates a patient's spiritual beliefs, values, and practices.	A nurse asks open-ended questions like "Does your faith play a role in your health?" or "Are there any religious or spiritual practices that are important to you?"
Respectful Care	Acknowledges and honors a patient's individual beliefs and practices.	A nurse ensures a Muslim patient has a prayer rug and space for daily prayers.
Holistic Interventions	Integrate spiritual care into the overall treatment plan.	A nurse facilitates contact with a religious preacher for a patient seeking religious guidance.
Communication	Uses active listening and open communication to understand a patient's spiritual needs.	A nurse validates a patient's spiritual needs by active communication.

### **Barriers to Spiritual Care**

The provision of spiritual care is hampered by a number of factors, including a lack of space and facilities for worship, a lack of facilities for washing one's hands and maintaining one's religious hygiene, environmental noise, crowding in the wards, and a lack of patient privacy. Providing spiritual care can also be hampered by a nurse's lack of enthusiasm in the profession, a poor impression of religious beliefs, issues with their family relationships, financial difficulties, and lack of drive (Green, 2019).

During care and treatment, the nurse should create an atmosphere that respects patients' rights, privacy, and spiritual beliefs; it should also encourage internal healing and maintain the values of the patient, family, and community. In order to uphold care ethics, nurses should put patients' safety from physical injury, recovery, and fostering an environment that supports spiritual care first. Receiving spiritual care education in pre-licensure nursing programs or at work increases nurses' preparedness to provide spiritual care, as well as their overall spiritual care competence. In addition, spiritual care competence is positively correlated with frequency of spiritual care. When nurses are educated and feel prepared, both spiritual care competence and frequency of spiritual care provision increase (Green, 2019).

### **Discussion**

This study set out to define spiritual care in a precise and thorough manner. We discovered that spiritual care is a dynamic and individualized notion that embodies the special nature of caregiving while incorporating all other facets. Additionally, we discovered that it possesses seven distinguishing characteristics: healing presence, therapeutic self-use, intuitive sense, spiritual perspective exploration, patient-centeredness, meaning-centered therapeutic intervention, and the establishment of a spiritually supportive atmosphere. Spiritual care mirrors a patient's reality and occurs within the framework of a nurse's knowledge of the transcendent aspect of life. It provides numerous benefits for both patients and nurses, including the advancement of spiritual awareness and job satisfaction for nurses, as well as psychological adaptation, healing, and the promotion of spiritual well-being. Spiritual nursing care goes beyond treating a patient's body; it acknowledges the importance of his/her spirit in healing. This care

involves open communication to assess a patient's search for meaning and purpose, especially when being disrupted by illness. By offering support for religious practices, fostering connections, or simply listening, nurses can address these spiritual needs. Ultimately, spiritual nursing care aims to integrate a patient's spiritual well-being into his/her overall treatment, fostering hope, peace, and a sense of wholeness during recovery.

### **Implications for Nursing**

This study suggests that incorporating spiritual nursing care into practice holds a number of significant implications for nurses and patients alike. Studies have shown that spiritual care can lead to better coping mechanisms for patients, reducing pain, stress, and anxiety. There's evidence that spiritual care can lessen feelings of depression and suicidal ideation. Patients who receive spiritual care often report higher satisfaction with their overall treatment experience.

The challenges and considerations in spiritual nursing care include that nurses may feel uncomfortable initiating conversations about spirituality due to a lack of confidence or training. It's crucial for nurses to develop cultural and religious sensitivity to provide appropriate spiritual care. There's a need for further research to solidify the link between spiritual care and positive health outcomes.

Overall, including spiritual care in nursing practice has the potential to significantly enhance patient well-being and expand the role of nurses in healthcare. By addressing barriers and challenges and fostering better training and education, nurses can become more equipped to integrate spiritual care into their practice.

### **Future Research and Development**

The literature review revealed a number of research gaps. While substantial research was undertaken on spiritual care in the early 2020s, there has been a shortage of adequate investigation on this topic in recent years. With the current healthcare changes, it will be necessary to revisit the topic of spiritual care in order to fulfill the changing requirements of patients in all healthcare settings. If research can uncover a technique that appears to be beneficial in a variety of clinical situations, it might be implemented into nursing-school curricula to better equip nurses to address their patients' spiritual needs. Another area that appears to be lacking

in current research is nurses' perceptions of providing spiritual care and their concerns about meeting this demand in their patients. Data collection and analysis may indicate nursing-education demands and gaps (Bangcola, 2021).

Future research on spiritual nursing care has an exciting potential. One area of focus could be the development of standardized spiritual assessment tools to ensure consistent and effective identification of patients' needs across diverse cultures and religions. Additionally, research could explore the specific impact of spiritual interventions on various patient populations, like how certain practices can improve coping mechanisms for chronic illnesses or anxiety related to end-of-life care. Furthermore, studies could investigate the best methods for integrating spiritual care into nursing education and practice, ensuring that nurses feel equipped to provide holistic and compassionate care to all patients (Bangcola, 2021).

Nurses may need to be prepared, organized, and equipped to provide care. Therefore, in order to give spiritual care, educational prerequisites are required. Some of these needs include the necessity of learning in real-world contexts through mentoring designs and modeling roles, the utilization of educational methodologies such as group discussions, and overcoming factors such as time constraints and people shortages that impede learning. As a result, future research is advised to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of these elements in the implementation of spiritual care interventions. There is also a need for setting-based research (including hospitals and other community-based care provider institutions) to actively deploy these spiritual care interventions using a prescriptive model. Nursing research should be simultaneously focused on the patient and on the theoretical framework, aiming to improve the quality of nursing care (Nell, 2012).

### Conclusion

The study's conclusions provide theoretical research and empirical support for nursing, creating a cumulative

added value. They also offer a framework for providing spiritual care to nurses and other caregivers in the form of impartial, workable interventions. Nurses must be trained to address patients' spiritual needs for providing more holistic and comprehensive care. Though nursing has evolved over time, it is important to remember that care is at the heart of the profession. Nurses should not be afraid of discussing spiritual issues with their patients. Prayer, scripture, presence, active listening, and referral are all interventions that can improve patient outcomes and should be included in patients' care regimens on a regular basis. Future studies on spiritual care in nursing should inform changes in education and practice. This patient's requirement must be prioritized alongside all other physical and mental needs. Spiritual nursing care isn't simply a complementary practice; it's a vital component of holistic patient care. By recognizing the profound link between a patient's spirit and his/her healing journey, nurses can provide more meaningful support. Through open communication and tailored interventions, spiritual care addresses patients' quests for meaning, hope, and connection (Yanli, 2019). This integration of spiritual well-being into treatment plans fosters a sense of wholeness, empowering patients to navigate illness with greater resilience and peace. Furthermore, promoting a sense of connection and support within the healthcare environment can enhance the overall healing process. It is imperative for nurses to recognize the significance of spirituality in patient care and to continually strive to integrate it into their practice. Through a collaborative and patient-centered approach, spiritual nursing care has the potential to positively impact patients' physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declares that he has no conflict of interests to declare.

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