Spirituality

Spirituality is experienced as the centre of the human self, spirit, and the seeking of connections that emerges from this. These connections are to the deepest self, others, the natural world and the transcendent. They provide meaning and purpose in life. Spirituality addresses the problem of human suffering, enabling growth, creativity, healing and health.

Holmes 2012
Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature and to the significant or sacred.

Puchalski, 2009
Understanding of spirituality

- Connection
- Mystery
- Uniqueness
- Unknowable – beyond rational and religious
- Centre of self
- Meaning and purpose
- Growth and transitions
- Seeking right path
- Religious beliefs

Spiritual issues in end of life care

- **Bearing witness to suffering**
- Courage
- Being there
- Connecting
- **Enabling hope**
- External and internal
- Cure vs healing
- Symbols of hope
- **Letting go**
- Trust
- Letting go
- Saying goodbye
Task 1

Tell your neighbour the story of a memorable patient who died.

Bearing witness to suffering

Courage

I spoke to the consultant about how I didn’t want to go into her room....You have to be quite brave. But then that’s an acknowledgement of how brave the other person is too. (3)
Bearing witness to suffering

Being there

(The consultant) said to me ‘You just go into the room. You don’t have to do anything. You just sit there’. So I went into her room and just sat there...and she started to weep and weep and sob and sob...” (3)

Bearing witness to suffering

Connecting

In the end you are just one human being to another. (3)
Bearing witness to suffering

Connecting

Just connecting with them is part of the process. Connecting and showing a willingness to reconnect. So that you become a sustaining thread.(18)

Task 2

What does hope mean and how can it be enabled?
Two strands of hope

Hope dependent on other people, happenings and circumstances: extrinsic hope

Hope experienced as part of self: intrinsic hope

Cure

Cure is the removal of disease by medical or surgical means. It focuses on the pathology of individual organs, systems and people.
Healing

Healing means to make whole. It is the alleviation of suffering in illness by finding new meaning, reconnection and reintegration of self with the family and community. In this cure of disease may or may not happen.

Healing actively addresses the cognitive, emotional and spiritual elements of the human experience. Healing can be accomplished on an individual basis when a caregiver attains a mindset of 'being with' rather than 'doing to' the patient or another.

Milstein 2012
Hope

And our job, I believe, is always to try and sieve through and find the glimmer of hope. Find the small bit of flame that, the small ember that might be fanned back to life to give hope again. (8)

Symbols of hope
Task 3

How do you cope with death and dying?

Letting go

It’s very much an internal personal challenge because you’re confronted with yourself the whole time... You’re confronted with your own emotions that come up ... as a response to someone else; and you’re confronted with your need to fix things when you can’t. (3)
Letting go

The sudden death is crippling...like you’re walking around with a skyscraper on your head and no one else can see it...It’s like you’re completely weighed down and...absorbed in holding this thing up...and dealing with the weight of it...you have to get support from outside the family...you couldn’t take on their skyscrapers as well(3)

Letting go

And we sat round the bedside ...But really the purpose of the gathering was having the people she felt some kind of responsibility to... and together we all gave her permission to let go. This is the season she was in, at this time to let go. (4)
Saying goodbye

So with Maori we return to the departing place for spirits: *Haere ki rarohenga*. Go to the underworld. *Haere ki ronga ki raro*. ...Farewell. And that’s an active process, it’s a process that’s never ending...People need place...I think about it in the context of connection. Until our spirits meet, your spirit is there waiting.(7)

Saying goodbye

I go to as many funerals as I can of patients, if I’m there. And I think that’s really important too, because it’s part of the grieving process for yourself. (8)

One of the things, sometimes I’m unsatisfied when someone you’ve known for a long time goes into hospital and ...they die and you’ve got no time to say goodbye.(13)
Task 4

How do you take care of yourself and attend to your own distress or suffering?

Supporting your spirit

- **Taking time**
  - Self awareness
  - to be in solitude
  - Meditation/Mindfulness/grounding
  - With music, literature, visual arts
- **Connecting**
  - with natural world
  - with family and friends
  - with transcendent
- **Creative activity**
  - writing, sewing, music, singing, drama,
  - gardening, woodwork, photography,
  - painting, cooking, craft work etc
- **Spiritual/Religious** activities
Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved with mankind
And therefore send not to ask for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee.

References

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