

SPIRITUALITY AND ITS IMPACT ON STRESS AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

Levels of stress are anticipated to present ongoing challenges for healthcare workers' well-being and life satisfaction. The purpose of this exploratory study was to (a) create awareness among healthcare executives and nursing leadership of the increasing levels of stress being experienced by healthcare staff and the possibility that spirituality could assist in mitigating stress in the healthcare setting, and (b) explore, via online survey, the association between spirituality, stress, and well-being as significant variables that impact doctors, nurses, and other members of the direct care team and the patients they serve. Findings of this study reveal significant correlations between spirituality, stress, and subjective well-being. The present study provides evidence to support the call to embrace spirituality in healthcare settings and to view spirituality as an asset to the delivery of effective care for both caregiver and patient alike.

Keywords: Spirituality, Stress, Subjective Well-Being, Doctors, Nurses, Healthcare, Burnout

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the Joint Commission's (2011) expectation that healthcare organizations assess and support spirituality, healthcare practices and practitioners are often hesitant to adopt more modern policies and procedures that actively embrace religion and spirituality. Furthermore, there is a very vocal secular and anti-religious segment of the American population that continues to push most anything associated with religion out of schools, universities, and the workplace.

However, despite these challenges, there is a growing amount of interest in the impact of spirituality on stress and subjective well-being (SWB) among healthcare professionals. This interest stems from the substantial evidence demonstrated in the literature establishing the benefits of religion and spirituality in healthcare for both caregiver and patient. There has likewise been a renewed scholarly interest in exploring spirituality as a mediator of stress and SWB, especially in high stress organizational contexts.

This is increasingly important in healthcare settings as multiple studies have found increasingly high levels of stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, and diminished SWB among both physical and mental healthcare practitioners with nurses often being at the top of the list (e.g., Dyrbye et al., 2017; Koinis et al., 2015; Kumar, 2016; & Waddill-Goad, 2018). It is suggested that this concerning trend among healthcare professionals be astutely recognized and actively addressed with evidence-based practices to reduce the undesirable effects of stress in the healthcare workplace. Our work in the present study focuses on the spiritual aspect of employee health, the Judeo-Christian view of spirituality in the workplace, and its impact on the stress and well-being of nurses and other healthcare professionals.

2. SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality, as defined by Milliman et al. (2003), is an individualized, internal, and subjective search for a relationship with a higher power (God, higher self, or other conceptualization) and the associated journey to find a purpose, direction, and worthwhile meaning in life. Mitroff and Denton (1999) suggested that spirituality is also the overarching desire to fulfill that purpose, direction, and meaning.

As part of the search to both find and fulfill life's purpose, individuals often view their job and work environment as an integral piece in that endeavor. This viewpoint is the basis for the argument that, at the