

Spiritual definitions from New Zealand: a map of the terrain

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Who am I?

How one understands, studies and explains spirituality may be considered as much related to the individual researcher's beliefs and worldview, as to his or her discipline, methods or subjects.

(Schneiders, 1989, p.694)

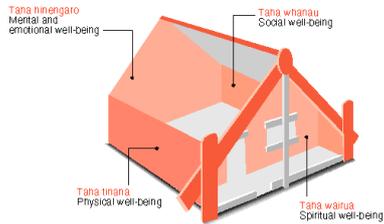


NZ Palliative Care Strategy

- Palliative care services:
 - ...
 - integrates physical (*tinana*), social (*whānau*), emotional (*hinengaro*) and spiritual (*wairua*) aspects of care to help the dying person and their family/whānau attain an acceptable quality of life.

NZPC Strategy 2001

Spirituality: Education and Health



Te Whare Tapa Wha

Spirituality in NZ end-of-life care

Aim: to investigate and improve understandings and practices of spirituality in New Zealand hospice care

Questions

What does spirituality mean for those affected by terminal illness (Ca)?

What are their spiritual needs?

What do Māori say about spirituality / spiritual care?

How can spiritual care be improved?

Other Studies

- Oncology Unit (2010-11)
- Medical Education (2011-12)
- Hospice Professional Development (2012-12)
- Kidney specialists (2012-13)
- Spirituality and young people (still seeking funding)

How did we do it?

Mixed methods

Populations: patients, family members, staff, chaplains, Māori experts

Pilot study: at the Otago Community Hospice

Study 1: 52 interviews

- 24 patients, 9 family members, 8 staff, 8 chaplains/spiritual carers, 3 Māori experts.
- analysis: recorded interviews; systematic write up after each interview ; transcribed; thematic coding

Study 2: surveyed 25 New Zealand's hospices (response rate 59%).

- analysis: returned surveys logged; data input; analysis using STATA

What did we find out?

- What does spirituality mean?
- Spiritual needs
- Spiritual care
- Context is critical
- How can it be improved?



Definitions

"we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn"

(William James 1901)

"So much depends on our perspective, and on the evidence on which we draw."

(Eckersley 2004)

Survey

Spirituality Definition Question

1. Which of the following would you include in a definition of spirituality? [Circle one or more]

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| a. Meaning | k. Essence |
| b. Purpose | l. Life giving force |
| c. Beliefs | m. Balance |
| d. Values | n. Transcendent |
| e. Identity | o. Faith |
| f. Sense of awareness | p. Mystery |
| g. Religion | q. Inner core |
| h. God | r. It is meaningless |
| i. Connectedness | s. Other..... |
| j. Relationships | |

Survey Spirituality Definition Question

Spirituality Definitions

All Populations
(out of 19 options)
'meaning', 'purpose', 'beliefs' and 'values' were in the top five choices of all populations

3% or less chose "it is meaningless"

Staff:

1st: 'meaning' (75%);
2nd: 'values' (74%);
3rd: purpose (68%);
4th: 'beliefs' (66%);
5th: 'awareness' (61%)

Patients:

1st: 'values' (51%);
2nd: 'beliefs' (50%);
3rd: 'faith' (47%);
4th: 'God' (44%);
6th: 'meaning' & 'purpose' (36%)

Family Members:

1st: 'values' (52%);
3rd=: 'beliefs' & 'faith' (52%);
4th: 'purpose' (50%);
6th: 'meaning' (45%)

Interviews: Definition One Liners

- *I really struggle with the definition of the word (Carl, 62, education, Ca),*
- *never gave it a thought (Frank, 75, photography, Ca);*
- *how one looks at the world and oneself (Henry, 76, finance, Ca)*
- *it extends to my whole being, relationships and where I am in this world (Iida, 45, hospice nurse).*
- *I think being spiritual is being a good Christian (Aida, 65, hospitality, FM)*
- *it is the essence of who I am (Abigail, 64, chaplain)*
- *"[it] embraces the essence of what it means to be human. (Damien, a 55, spiritual carer)*

Interviews: Definition Themes

Religious/transcendent Responses

- "Old Fashion Concept of Religion"
- Religion equals Spirituality
- Religion as One Expression of Spirituality
- Spirituality as the extra-ordinary

Humanist/existential Responses

- Beliefs / Values / Ethics
- Meaning and Purpose
- Core / essence / identity / well-being
- Relational / integration / wholeness
- Aesthetic
- Mindfulness

Summative/Integrative Responses

Most participants' definitions included a range of descriptors, drawing from the religious and existential; these definitions were categorized as summative or inclusive responses.

Māori expert's view of spirituality

- Te taha wairua is generally felt by Māori to be the most essential requirement for health (Durie, 1998)
- “one of the single most important words is about connecting and connecting generations, connecting families, ... that connection between people”. ... “we know there is the spiritual stuff because the spiritual stuff is connected with the past and the future.
(Dr Ngata, thesis interview)
- “I call it communion, ... communion in being able to commune with something, ..., inanimate or person”.
(Peter, thesis interview)

Understanding Spiritual Definitions

Definition Type	Example	Comment
Religious/transcendent	"I do see it as religion" (hospice nurse)	focus solely on religious aspects (Vandara, 1989).
Behavioural/secular /humanist / existential	"I believe it's about belief systems" (patient)	Totally immanent or of this world (Lindridge, 2007 #Geering, 2005)
Contemporary inclusive/mixed/ summative	"[it] embraces the essence of what it means to be human. ... The spirit holds together the physical, psychological and social dimension of life" (chaplain)	Most common in the contemporary literature (Roudsari, 2007).
Other (outside continuum)	"I think it is the wrong word" (hospice nurse)	Those who just cannot imagine themselves having anything to do with spirituality

All quotes from participants in author's PhD study (Egan, 2010)

What is spirituality? Map of the terrain.

Spirituality means different things to different people. It may include (a search for):

- one's ultimate beliefs and values;
- a sense of meaning and purpose in life;
- a sense of connectedness;
- identity and awareness;
- and for some people, religion.



It may be understood at an individual or population level.

Egan, R., MacLeod, R., Jaye, C., McGee, R., Baxter, J., & Herbison, P. (2011). What is spirituality? Evidence from a New Zealand hospice study. *Mortality*, 16(4), 307-324.

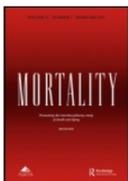
Criticisms of the Definitions

- From a religious voice – relativizes spirituality, making it “wishy washy”. (Sinclair, 2006)
- From a secular voice – spirituality may be appropriated for particular ends (eg. political, commercial).
- Some definitions “over inclusive” (Kellehear 2000)
- A term that everyone uses but nobody understands. (Sinclair, 2006)
- BUT: Unruh et al argue “there is substantial agreement across authors from diverse professional backgrounds about what is meant by spirituality” (Unruh, et al., 2002, p. 9). See also McSherry, Kellehear and Harris – “shared conceptual understanding” (2008, p.39)

Latest NZ MoH Guidelines

“It is essential that all staff working in cancer treatment services have a basic understanding of the spiritual needs of people with cancer, possess the skills to assess those needs and know how to go about contacting spiritual caregivers when required. Training specific to the cultural and spiritual needs of Māori is essential.”

Ministry of Health (2010). Guidance for Improving Supportive Care for Adults with Cancer in New Zealand. Wellington: Ministry of Health. P.46



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What is spirituality? Evidence from a New Zealand hospice study

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Discussion

'Ko te Amorangi ki mua, ki te hapai o ki muri'

**'Place the things of the spirit to the fore,
and all else shall follow behind'**

Takitimu whakatauki (proverb)
(Payne, Tankersley, & McNaughton A (Ed), 2003, p. 85)
