



What Do I Say?: Talking with Patients about Spirituality

By Elizabeth Johnston-Taylor

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Health care professionals, clergy, chaplains, social workers and others who counsel people in medical crisis often find themselves faced with deeply painful questions: Why is this happening to me? Am I dying? Why should I live? Im just a burden to others. The author, an internationally recognized expert in spiritual care giving, points out that wanting to help is one motivation for learning these skills, but there are also evidence-based reasons: helping patients express their innermost feelings promotes spiritual healing; spiritual health is related to physical and emotional health; spiritual coping helps patients accept and deal with their illness; and patients tend to want their health care professionals to know about their spirituality. Lessons, tips, and exercises teach how to listen effectively, with guidelines for detecting and understanding the spiritual needs embedded in patients conversations. Suggestions are provided for verbal responses to patients who express spiritual distress, including tips for building rapport, using self-disclosure, and praying with patients. A FAQ section deals with frequently asked questions and miscellaneous information, such as: What do I do when a patient talks on and on and I have to leave? How do I answer a why question? What do I say to a patient who believes a miracle will happen to cure them? What if Im not religious? How can I talk about it? By practicing and using these healing techniques, Taylor explains, health care professionals will be able to provide patients responses to their questions that allow them to become intellectually, emotionally, and physically aware of their spirituality so they can experience life more fully.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Elizabeth Johnston Taylor, Ph.D., R.N., has a Ph.D. in Nursing and an M.S.N. in Oncology Nursing from the University of Pennsylvania, as well as training in chaplaincy and spiritual direction. She has authored or coauthored more than fifty publications and has been awarded eight funded research projects. She lectures frequently on spirituality and health and is currently associate professor, School of Nursing, at Loma Linda University in California. She lives in San Marino, California.

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