

Exploring Spirituality with People who use Mental Health services

- an online CPD module addressing assessment, interventions and dilemmas.

Dr Sarah Eagger MB, BS; FRCPsych

Exploring spirituality with people who use mental health services

This module will help you to develop your awareness of patients' spiritual health needs and will enable you to consider your own spiritual development.



Most popular CPD eLearning free-access module 2024/2025

Exploring spirituality with people who use mental
health services

Dr Sarah Eagers and Prof Chris C.H. Cook

Thank you for your contribution to CPD eLearning

Howard Ryland

Dr Howard Ryland, CPD eLearning Editor

Exploring spirituality with people who use mental health services

- **We are pleased to offer this module free for those without a paid subscription.**
- RCPsych members can log in using their College website credentials.
- Otherwise, all you need to do is
- **register with the College**

[Log in to see options tailored to you](#)

This module guides clinicians to...

- Recognise and address patients' spiritual needs
- Highlight current approaches and literature
- Encourage personal reflection
- Offer practical strategies for taking a spiritual history
- Navigate potential challenges

Module outline

- **Section 1.** What is spirituality and why is it important?
- **Section 2.** Taking a spiritual history
- **Section 3.** Engaging with patients' spiritual concerns
- **Section 4.** Potential dilemmas in addressing spiritual aspects of patient care
- **References**
- **Further reading**
- **Useful websites**
- **Module test**
- **About the authors**

Section 1: What is spirituality and why is it important?

- Definitions of spirituality
- Religion vs. spirituality
- Drivers of the spirituality agenda
- Service user perspectives
- Legislation & policy
- Patient perspective
- Evolving professional approaches
- Research evidence
- The importance of spiritual care in mental health
- Recap / Summary

“

Reflection

Imagine you have developed an illness or experienced a loss. What would support you most at this time? How would you make sense of your experiences?

”



Section 2: Taking a spiritual history

- Identifying spiritual needs
- Importance and methods of spiritual assessment
- Who conducts assessments and where are they documented
- Models and approaches for spiritual history
- Formulating care based on assessment

What do we mean by spiritual needs?

Swinton (2001)

Values/ structures of meaning	Relationships	Transcendence	Communication	Affective feeling
Hope	Therapeutic presence	The need to explore dimensions beyond the self	Talking and telling stories	Comfort
Faith	The possibility of intimacy	The possibility of reaching God without the use of formal religious structures	Listening and being listened to	Reassurance
Search for meaning/ purpose to life				Peace
Dealing with guilt and initiating forgiveness				Happiness

Initial Screening questions



For this question asking the client to think in terms of both sources of inner strength and external practical and emotional support. i.e. from family, friends, and/or faith community.

Screening questions: to start a conversation about spirituality

Royal College of Psychiatrists 2021

[Spirituality and mental health](#)

- "What gives you hope?"
- "What keeps you going in difficult times?"
- "What is really important in your life?"
- "Would you say you are spiritual or religious in any way?"

Examples of mnemonic tools

FICA(Puchalski and Romer, 2000) for all patients

Faith and belief

Importance

Community

Address in care

HOPE (Anandarajah &Hight, 2001) in the GP setting

Hope and comfort -sources

Organised religion

Personal spirituality

Effects on care

Assessment tools specific to mental health

Royal College of Psychiatrists (Cook and Grimwade, 2021)

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/spirituality-and-mental-health>

1. **Identity:** does the person identify as religious? Spiritual but not religious? Neither? Is this important for self-understanding?
2. **Relationships:** which are the most important (e.g. people, God, faith)? Are they supportive or do they cause stress?
3. **Practices:** supportive and harmful R/S practices
4. **Meaning and purpose:** what's really important? Fulfilling? Causes of anxiety?
5. **Implications:** for therapy/interventions/treatment

Following the assessment - formulation

	Impact of Spirituality on Illness	Impact of Illness on Spirituality
Healthy	How can the patient's spirituality support recovery and resilience?	Is the patient seeking to explore or address spiritual questions?
Unhealthy	Are there aspects of the patient's spirituality that may negatively impact their health?	Has the illness distorted or become confused with the patient's spirituality?

Section 3: Engaging with patients' spiritual concerns

- Conducting spiritual conversations with patients
- Addressing spiritual struggles
- Key elements of spiritual care from the patient's view
- Clinical vignettes (5)
- Benefits of spiritual care: rapport, clarifying symptoms, emotional responses, addictions, other disorders
- Accessing resources
- Engaging chaplains and spiritual advisors

Spiritual care and its prerequisites

(Selman, 2017)

- Help with integrating personal faith into the illness experience
- Providing a safe space
- Sympathetic and confidential listening and counselling
- Providing existential support
- Human connection at a difficult time
- Care that goes beyond the physical

Section 4: Potential dilemmas in addressing spiritual aspects of patient care

- Addressing practical issues and language barriers
- Managing the religiosity gap
- Ethical and boundary controversies
- Pathological spirituality
- Professional competency
- Balancing confidentiality, privacy, and respect

The role of religion and spirituality in mental health: research and clinical practice

This module equips you with the skills to engage with the growing awareness of and interest in spiritual matters as a profession.



Resources



1. The Royal College of Psychiatrists' Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group in the UK

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/special-interest-groups/spirituality/resources>

2. Online CPD module – Free

[Exploring spirituality with people who use mental health services \(rcpsych.ac.uk\)](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/online/cpd/modules/exploring-spirituality-with-people-who-use-mental-health-services)

3. Leaflet – Free

[Spirituality and mental health | Royal College of Psychiatrists \(rcpsych.ac.uk\)](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/leaflet-spirituality-and-mental-health)

4. Chris Cook Paper

[Religion and spirituality in clinical practice | BJPsych Advances | Cambridge Core](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/BJPsych/advance-article/doi/10.1192/bjp.2019.220/140000)