

# A Guide to the Assessment of Spiritual Concerns in Mental Healthcare

## 1. *Taking account of the Spiritual Dimension*

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/index.asp>

a) The following questions are easily asked, are not intrusive, and could alert the team to the need for the appropriate response:

- What is the patient's spiritual/religious background?
- Are spiritual/religious beliefs supportive and positive, or anxiety provoking and punitive?
- What role did spirituality/religion play in childhood, and how does the patient feel about that now?
- What role does spirituality/religion play now in the patient's life?
- Is religion/spirituality drawn upon to cope with stress? In what ways?
- Is the patient a member of any religious community? Is it supportive?
- What is the patient's relationship with their clergy like?
- Are there any spiritual/religious issues the patient would like to discuss in therapy?
- Do the patient's spiritual/religious beliefs influence the type of therapy he or she would be most comfortable with?
- Do those beliefs influence how the person feels about taking medication?

b) **'HEALING FROM WITHIN: A Guide for Assessing the Religious and Spiritual Aspects of People's Lives'** Dr Larry Culliford and Rev Dr Stuart Johnson <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/index.htm>

## c) **THE MEASUREMENT OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL BELIEFS**

Professor Michael King, Royal Free and University College London Medical School

*King et al.* (1995) The Royal Free Interview for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs. *Psychological Medicine* 25: 1125-1134.

*King, M. Speck, P. Thomas, A.* (2001) The Royal Free Interview for Spiritual and Religious Beliefs: development and validation of a self-report version. *Psychological Medicine* 31:1015–1023

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/sig/spirit/publications/king.pdf>

**2. Spirituality and Medical Practice: Using the HOPE Questions as a Practical Tool for Spiritual Assessment**  
<http://www.aafp.org/afp/20010101/81.html>

**The HOPE Questions for a Formal Spiritual Assessment in a Medical Interview**

**H:** Sources of hope, meaning, comfort, strength, peace, love and connection

**O:** Organized religion

**P:** Personal spirituality and practices

**E:** Effects on medical care and end-of-life issues

**Examples of Questions for the HOPE Approach to Spiritual Assessment**

**H:** Sources of hope, meaning, comfort, strength, peace, love and connection

We have been discussing your support systems. I was wondering, what is there in your life that gives you internal support?

What are your sources of hope, strength, comfort and peace?

What do you hold on to during difficult times?

What sustains you and keeps you going?

For some people, their religious or spiritual beliefs act as a source of comfort and strength in dealing with life's ups and downs; is this true for you?

If the answer is "Yes," go on to O and P questions.

If the answer is "No," consider asking: Was it ever? If the answer is "Yes," ask: What changed?

**O:** Organized religion

Do you consider yourself part of an organized religion?

How important is this to you?

What aspects of your religion are helpful and not so helpful to you?

Are you part of a religious or spiritual community? Does it help you? How?

**P:** Personal spirituality/practices

Do you have personal spiritual beliefs that are independent of organized religion? What are they?

Do you believe in God? What kind of relationship do you have with God?

What aspects of your spirituality or spiritual practices do you find most helpful to you personally? (e.g., prayer, meditation, reading scripture, attending religious services, listening to music, hiking, communing with nature)

**E:** Effects on medical care and end-of-life issues

Has being sick (or your current situation) affected your ability to do the things that usually help you spiritually? (Or affected your relationship with God?)

As a doctor, is there anything that I can do to help you access the resources that usually help you?

Are you worried about any conflicts between your beliefs and your medical situation/care/decisions?

Would it be helpful for you to speak to a clinical chaplain/community spiritual leader?

Are there any specific practices or restrictions I should know about in providing your medical care? (e.g., dietary restrictions, use of blood products)

*If the patient is dying:* How do your beliefs affect the kind of medical care you would like me to provide over the next few days/weeks/months?

### **3. University of Minnesota, Centre for Spirituality and Healing**

- online learning – spirituality in Healthcare – free module on taking a spiritual history using all these methods- **a resource highly recommended**

<http://www.csh.umn.edu/modules/index.html>

### **4. The George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health**

<http://www.gwish.org/index.htm>

## **FICA – TAKING A SPIRITUAL HISTORY**

The acronym FICA can help structure questions in taking a spiritual history by Healthcare Professionals.

### **F—Faith and Belief**

“Do you consider yourself spiritual or religious?” or “Do you have spiritual beliefs that help you cope with stress?” IF the patient responds “No,” the physician might ask, “What gives your life meaning?” Sometimes patients respond with answers such as family, career, or nature.

### **I—Importance**

“What importance does your faith or belief have in our life? Have your beliefs influenced how you take care of yourself in this illness? What role do your beliefs play in regaining your health?”

### **C—Community**

“Are you part of a spiritual or religious community? Is this of support to you and how? Is there a group of people you really

love or who are important to you?” Communities such as churches, temples, and mosques, or a group of like-minded friends can serve as strong support systems for some patients.

**A—Address in Care**

“How would you like me, your healthcare provider, to address these issues in your healthcare?”

---

Adapted with permission from Puchalski CM, Romer AL. Taking a spiritual history allows clinicians to understand patients more fully. J Pall Med 2000; 3:129-37.  
Copyright, Christina M. Puchalski, MD, 1996.

---

**5. *Spiritual competency website – David Lukoff PhD***

<http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/index.asp>

**A. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND BELIEFS -**

What religion did your family practice when you were growing up?  
How religious were your parents?  
Do you practice a religion currently?  
Do you believe in God or a higher power?  
What have been important experiences and thoughts about God/Higher Power?  
How would you describe God/Higher Power? Personal or impersonal? Loving or stern?

**B. SPIRITUAL MEANING AND VALUES**

Do you follow any spiritual path or practice (e.g., meditation, yoga, chanting)?  
What significant spiritual experiences have you had (e.g. mystical experience, near-death experience, 12-step spirituality, drug-induced, dreams)?

**C. PRAYER EXPERIENCES**

Do you pray? When? In what way(s)?  
How has prayer worked in your life?

**6. 'FAITH' ASSESSMENT TOOL:** See: Neely, D. & Minford, E. (2009) FAITH: spiritual history-taking made easy. *Clinical Teacher*. 6: 181-185.

### **Patient centred framework for taking a spiritual history**

Faith/spiritual beliefs  
Application  
Influence/importance  
Talk/terminal events planning  
Help

Examples of questions:

#### **F: Faith/spiritual beliefs**

Do you have any particular faith, religious or spiritual beliefs?

What gives your life meaning?

What helps you cope in times of stress or illness?

#### **A: Application**

In what ways do you apply your faith in your daily life?

Do you belong to a particular church or community?

Is prayer or meditation important to you?

**I: Influence/Importance** of faith in life, in this illness and on health care decisions.

How do your faith and spiritual beliefs influence your life? Are they important to you?

How do your faith and spiritual beliefs influence you in this illness? Have they altered your attitude or behaviour?

Has this illness influenced your faith?

Do your beliefs influence or affect your health care decisions that would be helpful for me to know about?

#### **T: Talk/Terminal** events planning

Do you have anyone you can trust to talk to about spiritual or religious issues?

Do you have any specific requests if you were to become terminally ill? (e.g. terminal care options, living will or end of life requests.)

#### **H: Help**

Is there any way I or another member of the health care team can help you?

Do you require assistance or help with prayer? (E.g. facilities or accompaniment)

Would you like to speak to a chaplain?

Would you like to discuss spiritual issues or your beliefs with your doctor?

**7. Wendy Edwards and Peter Gilbert. Chapter 11, page 154; *Spirituality, Values and Mental Health: Jewels for the Journey*, (2007) London: Jessica Kingsley**

**Adapted from Fitchett 1993; Narayanasamy 2001; Robinson, et al 2003**

- **Identity:** What are the components which make up an individual's identity, nurture and nature, ethnicity, values, belief systems (including possibly a religious faith); and how has that identity travelled and might still be travelling?
- **Belief and meaning:** What are the beliefs that give meaning and purpose to a person's life and the symbols that reflect them?
- **Sources of strength and hope:** Where does the individual derive their strength from and what gives them hope? Are these derived from individuals, groups, places, current or past experiences? What helps the individual draw strength and hope at a time of crisis?
- **Love and relatedness:** How does the individual relate to those intimate with them; family, relatives, friends and others? Assumptions that families will be helpful or unhelpful are particularly dangerous here. Are there fractured relationships which need healing?
- **Vocation and obligation:** What sense of calling and obligation does the person have in their life and how are these expressed in relationships?
- **Affirmation:** Does the individual feel affirmed by their past and present experiences and relationships? What gives them affirmation and can a vacuum of affirmation be filled?
- **Experience and emotion:** How does the experience of illness and the associated feelings relate to the individual's life meaning? How do the internal and external worlds of the individual relate to each other? How are 'negative' feelings handled? e.g. anxiety, guilt and anger.
- **Courage and growth:** This involves questions about how the person has coped with crises in the past and how adaptable are their views/beliefs now?
- **Transcendence:** What provides an individual with their sense of transcendence? This may or may not involve relating to a divine entity, but may be through an engagement with nature, art, sport, etc.

- **Rituals and practices:** Exploring the rituals which support the person's life meaning and how they are being used in the present situation. This will be relevant for people with religious faith, but also may be for those who have lapsed from their faith, and are re-discovering it, or may be of a purely secular variety. For some with a religious faith, the experience of mental distress and the arousal of some emotions, such as guilt, may make them feel cut off from prayer and sacraments and, therefore, deny them nurture and comfort.
- **Community:** How does the individual relate to their significant community? Is the service facilitating positive connection with the community; and how does it give meaning to her/him? There may be elements of community life which may be harmful, and the service may have to act as a conduit, but one with a filter, if a social group is reinforcing elements of 'punishment'.
- **Authority and guidance:** Where does the individual look for guidance about life meaning in moments of stress? Is this fixed or flexible? If there is a need for 'mediation', e.g. through an imam or priest, etc., is such a person available, e.g. through chaplaincy services?

**8. Talking about spirituality in healthcare practice. Gillian White (2006)  
London: Jessica Kingsley**

**Suggested questions for spiritual assessment - page 121**

- **Meaning and Purpose**
  - What are some things that give you a sense of purpose?
  - Do you have a specific aim that is important to you at the moment?
  - Do you believe in any kind of existence after this life?
  - Has your illness changed your attitude to the future?
  - What bothers you most about being ill?
- **Security and hope**
  - What are your sources of strength and hope?
  - Who do you turn to when you need help? In what ways do they help?
  - What inner resources do you draw upon?
  - Where do you go for comfort and support?
  - Who or what do you depend on when things go wrong?
- **Religion / spirituality**
  - Do you consider yourself to be religious or spiritual?
  - How does this affect you? Has being ill changed this?
  - Is prayer helpful to you? Can you talk about how?
  - Is there anything we can do to support your spiritual / religious practice?

**Compiled by Dr. Sarah Eagger 2005 Revised 2009**