SPIRITUALITY & HEALTH RESEARCH: REFLECTIONS ON THE STATE OF THE FIELD

Chaplain John Ehman

Spirituality, Religion, and Health Interest Group
Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania
April 5, 2017
Plan for the Presentation

- Overall observations about trends in the field

- Key areas of research activity to watch
  - research about and for chaplains
  - spiritual assessment
  - stress-related/post-traumatic growth
  - religious practices as indicators
  - studies focusing on the working of the body

- Observations on other directions in the field

- Discussion
Number of Medline-Indexed English Articles by Year, with Keywords: RELIGION and SPIRITUALITY

[ Includes the variations: religious, religiosity, religiousness, and spiritual ]
Number of Medline-Indexed English Articles by Year, with Keywords *SPIRITUAL* or *SPIRITUALITY*

John Ehman, 6/30/09
Observations about Overall Trends

1) The novelty about spirituality & health research has largely worn off in the US

2) Growth of research internationally

3) Waning of polemical “distractions” in the field

4) Greater scientific rigor & more realistic expectations

5) The problem of language in the field remains

6) Chaplains are increasingly involved with research
A Recent and Important Definition of *Spirituality*:

“Spirituality is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, and transcendence, and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred. Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions, and practices.”

— p. 646 of Puchalski, C. M., et al., "Improving the Spiritual Dimension of Whole Person Care: Reaching National and International Consensus," *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 17, no. 6 (June 2014): 642-656
Sample of Upcoming Chaplaincy Conference Workshops

**ACPE:**
- Teaching Research Literacy in CPE
- Research in CPE: Past, Present and Future
- Integrating CPE into a Master of Science Degree Program at a Major Research University
- Rediscovering Meaning from Trauma: An Evidence-Based Perspective

**NACC:**
- Care Conferences - A Research Project
- Journeying with Research: Problems and Promise of Research in Religion, Spirituality and Health
- Metrics for Spiritual Care: A KentuckyOne Health Intervention
- Rediscovering Meaning from Trauma: An Evidence-Based Perspective

**APC:**
- Increasing Research Literacy through Journal Clubs
- Researching Hospice Coping and Resiliency
- A Different Variety of Chaplain Participation in Research
- Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices
Transforming Chaplaincy Project

Led by George Fitchett and Wendy Cadge

www.researchliteratechaplaincy.org

- Online survey completed by 2,092 chaplains from 23 countries
- 80% thought that research was important to the profession, and 70% thought that chaplains should be “research literate”
- 40% regularly read research articles, and 60% occasionally do
- Respondents rated their research literacy on average as 6.5/10
- 37% had been somehow involved in research, 17% were currently involved, and 11% were expecting to be involved
Key Areas of Research Activity to Watch
Research about and for Chaplains
Research about and for Chaplains

DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES


Research about and for Chaplains

INTERVENTIONAL STUDIES


Spiritual Assessment
Spiritual Assessment


Evaluated the following:

1) "Do you struggle with the loss of meaning and joy to your life?"

2) "Do you currently have what you would describe as religious or spiritual struggles?"

3) "Are you at peace?"

4) "Does your religion/spirituality provide you all the strength and comfort you need from it right now?"

5) "Do you have any spiritual/religious concerns?"

6) Two-path Revised Rush Religious Struggle Protocol, asking first about the importance of R/S in the patient's life and then, depending on the response, asking either how much their R/S is helping them now or whether R/S has been important previously.
Spiritual Assessment
(contuned)

Stress-Related/Post-Traumatic Growth
Stress-Related/Post-Traumatic Growth


Religious Practices as Indicators
Religious Practices as Indicators


Studies Focusing on the Working of the Body
Studies Focusing on the Working of the Body


Additional Observations in Closing
Brief observations on other directions in the field

- Mortality studies
- Spirituality in healthcare education
- Military/veteran studies
- Coping (positive & negative) as a construct
- Satisfaction studies
- Studies of “extraordinary spiritual experiences”
- Studies that seek to assess dollar costs/savings
- Meditation interventions
Posi
ve Religious Coping Subscale

1) Looked for a stronger connection with God
2) Sought God’s love and care.
3) Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.
4) Tried to put my plans into action together with God.
5) Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.
6) Asked forgiveness of my sins.
7) Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems.

Negative Religious Coping Subscale

8) Wondered whether God had abandoned me.
9) Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion.
10) Wondered what I did for God to punish me.
11) Questioned God’s love for me.
12) Wondered whether my church had abandoned me.
13) Decided the devil made this happen.
14) Questioned the power of God.
RESOURCES

ACPE Research Network

www.ACPEResearch.net

Annual Bibliographies on Spirituality & Health

*Posted annually on the Penn Medicine Pastoral Care website:*

www.uphs.upenn.edu/pastoral

(see under links for hospital staff)
john.ehman@uphs.upenn.edu