

# Spirituality and Health

**Developed by  
Manitoba's Spiritual Health Care Partners**

**June 2017**

*Please note that this material is for resource information only  
and is not intended as policy direction from the Province of Manitoba.*

*Spirituality is the essence of our humanity.*

-Viktor Frankl



*There are as many ways to be spiritual  
as there are people.*

- Henri Nouwen

# Presentation Goals

- I. Define **spirituality** within a health care context
- II. Distinguish **spirituality from religion**
- III. Clarify the **link between spirituality and health**
- IV. Explain how **spiritual health care** is facilitated in Manitoba

# Part I

## What is spirituality?



# Four longings (Frain 2010):

- ❖ To live a **meaningful and purposeful** life
- ❖ For a sense **of connectedness** and connection
- ❖ To live with **trust and hope** in an uncertain universe
- ❖ To experience a **sense of belonging** to something greater than ourselves

# Definition: Spirituality in health care

*A dynamic and intrinsic aspect of our humanity through which persons seek ultimate **meaning, purpose, & 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.

(Puchalski et al. 2014, 646)

Spirituality, then, is connected to a sense of:

- ❖ **Meaning & purpose**
- ❖ **Hopefulness**
- ❖ **Connectedness, belonging** - to self, others, to something enduring (i.e. Higher power/ Ultimate Reality/Creative Intelligence)



# Central Features (Swinton 2001)

- ❖ **Meaning:** sense of significance of life; making sense of life situations/suffering; sense of purpose (closely related to hope)
- ❖ **Core beliefs and values**
- ❖ **Experience/appreciation** of something beyond the self. Awe & wonder. (**Transcendence**)
- ❖ **Connecting:** significant relationships with self, others, nature, higher power/the cosmos (language will be very individual)
- ❖ **Becoming:** experience and appreciation of an unfolding life; includes a deep sense of who one is and how one knows



# Spirituality is expressed through:

**Beliefs & values** - about life, death and suffering, meaning

**Traditions & practices** - prayer and meditation, religious practices, commitment to a way of living

**Sacred awareness/experience** - of sacred relationship, transcendence, of Divine love, interconnectedness, wholeness, deep stillness, the flow of life, Ultimate Mystery

# Spirituality distinguished from religion

## Religion:

- ❖ **organized set of beliefs and practices** designed to guide its members in how to live and worship
- ❖ affiliated with a sense of **community support and healthy behaviours**

## Spirituality:

- ❖ is **universal and personal**, not necessarily tied to any particular religious tradition
- ❖ **religion is *one of the ways*** we may experience & express our spirituality

## Spirituality

- ❖ 79% of Canadians report they believe in God or a universal spirit.

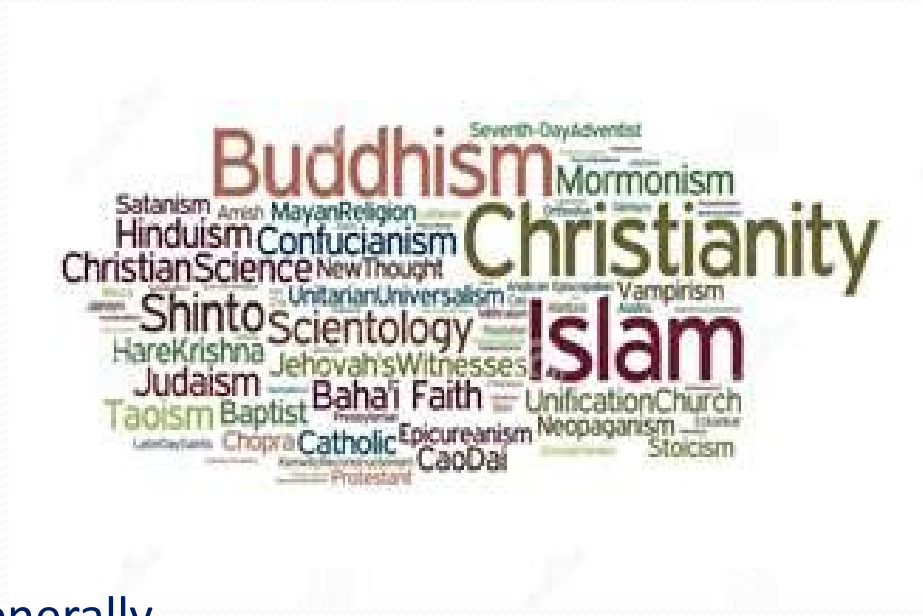
(Environics Institute 2011, 45)

## Attendance – religious services (Bibby 2010)

- ❖ Since 1970s, Canadians who never attend services has doubled from about 20% to **40%**
- ❖ In the last decade, those who worship at least once a month has remained *steady* at around **30%**
- ❖ Remaining **30%** of Canadians - haven't dropped out and occasionally drop in

# Major religious traditions

- ❖ Christianity
- ❖ Islam
- ❖ Hinduism
- ❖ Buddhism
- ❖ Chinese traditional
- ❖ Sikhism
- ❖ Judaism
  
- ❖ Indigenous - Traditional – generally regarded as a way of life and not a formal religious tradition
  
- ❖ Non-religious - includes agnostic, atheist, secular humanist



# Common focus in the world's major wisdom traditions

## Principles & practices that inspire and cultivate:

- ❖ **Love** - of ourselves, our neighbors/fellow beings, of creation and of our Ultimate Reality/Creator/God
- ❖ **Wisdom** - help in our human search for hope and meaning, how to live with uncertainty and mystery, cope with suffering and death
- ❖ **Awareness of the sacred dimension of life** - through worship, prayer, meditation, singing and other forms of spiritual practice
- ❖ **Respect** for our fellow human beings while acknowledging our differences
- ❖ **Compassion, generosity & altruistic service** for the benefit of others

## Part II

# Spirituality & Health



***Spirituality is as relevant for the non-religious as it is for the religious because it is about the fundamental meaning of being human.*** - Malcolm Goldsmith\*

### ***A healthy spirituality:***

- ❖ **Moves us:** toward love and compassion, truthfulness, meaning, hope, connectedness, wholeness, gratitude and forgiveness
- ❖ **Provides answers:** to life's existential questions
- ❖ **Associated with:** greater wellbeing; & ability to cope with suffering, to move past despair (not a panacea)

\**Spirituality and Personhood in Dementia.* Albert Jewell (ed.)



**Spirituality is an integral part of being human & therefore foundational to health!**



## Health Canada states:

Healthy living means making positive choices that enhance your personal physical, mental and spiritual health.

## The World Health Organization (WHO):

has endorsed spirituality as an integral component of overall health (1998).



# **WHOLE PERSON HEALTH CARE\***

**Physical**

**Emotional**

**Social**

**Spiritual**

**All dimensions of the WHOLE PERSON  
must be attended to and kept in balance.**

\*World Health Organization Executive Board 1998

# INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW

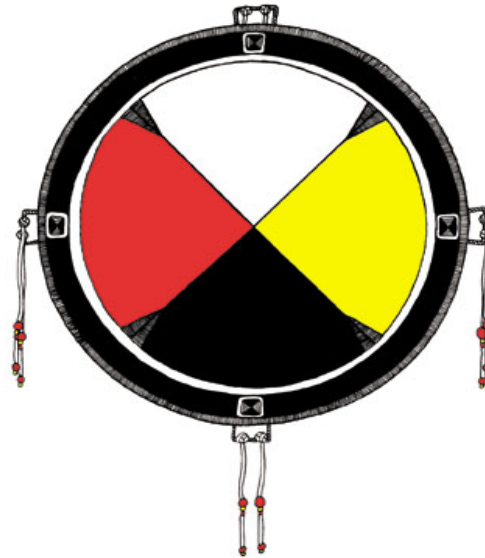
## Four Human Aspects\*

Physical

Mental

Emotional

Spiritual



\*WRHA Indigenous Health. It should be noted that Indigenous traditional teachings highlight the importance of maintaining and restoring a **balance** among the **physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of health**. The colors of the Medicine Wheel are interchangeable depending on the nation and their teachings.

# Benefits of a healthy spirituality

*Attending to our spiritual life enables us to access inner resources of strength, keeps us energized with hope and faith.*

-Robert Gerzon

- ❖ connects us with inner resources of **resiliency: strength & stability for coping with adversity**
- ❖ feeds our sense of **gratitude and hopefulness**
- ❖ helps us come to terms with **suffering and death.**

# Health outcomes (Puchalski & Ferrell 2010, 4)

- ❖ **Quality of life (QOL)**, meaning, purpose and capacity for growth, even with advanced disease
- ❖ **Mortality:** those with regular spiritual practices tend to live longer
- ❖ **Coping /resiliency:** will to live, less death anxiety; ability to cope with illness, manage pain and life stresses
- ❖ **Better health outcomes & recovery** from illness and surgery. A key component in mental health recovery
- ❖ Mental health: lower measured depression and anxiety; and substantially **reduced risk for substance abuse and suicide**

***Cultivating a healthy spirituality, sense of meaning and connectedness, is important to health and well-being***

***Spiritual practices** strengthen our spirituality by offering an invitation to reconnect with our **deepest self** and/or with **something enduring beyond the self** for strength and renewal.*



# Simple spiritual self-care, traditional and non-traditional

- ❖ Prayer , meditation, and contemplation (intentional silence)
- ❖ Communing with beauty, nature
- ❖ Meaningful ritual – religious worship or otherwise
- ❖ Spiritual support groups and other deep and meaningful connection
- ❖ Creative expression (music, art, dance, cooking, gardening)

(continued).....

*Simple practices, continued...*

- ❖ Journal writing
- ❖ Inspirational reading or music
- ❖ Service and simple acts of kindness
- ❖ Cultivate joy and laughter (play)
- ❖ Reconciliation with self and/or others (forgiveness)



## Spiritual self care - being intentional about:

- ❖ Connecting with our own personal sources of hope, comfort, meaning, strength, peace, love and connection; *and*
- ❖ Removing energy drains as much as possible.





***Reflection on sources of strength, meaning,  
hope and comfort***



***What helps you cope during difficult times?***

***What gives you hope and strength to keep going, helps  
sustain you?***

***What drains you?***

## Part III

# Spirituality and Illness



*Illnesses are deeply meaningful events within people's lives, events that often challenge people to think about their lives quite differently. Spirituality sits at the heart of such experiences.*



John Swinton, PhD.  
University of Aberdeen,  
Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability

# Why spirituality/religion matter?

They can impact:

- ❖ **the way people understand** health, illness, diagnoses, recovery and loss
- ❖ **decision-making** about treatment, medicine and self-care (McCord et al. 2004)
- ❖ **expectations of/relationship with health service providers**
- ❖ **day-to-day health practices & lifestyle choices**
- ❖ spirituality is often the **central concern for persons experiencing chronic illness and those at end of life** (Puchalski & Ferrell 2009)

# Culture and spirituality

- ❖ Spirituality is often **inseparable from one's cultural identity**
- ❖ **Newcomers to Canada** access their religious/spiritual leaders as the first line of help seeking when experiencing mental health problems. (Mental Health Commission of Canada 2009)

Spirituality can impact how a person *understands* health & illness, the strategies they use to cope, as well as the decisions they make about treatment.

❖ When facing health and end of life issues, people often turn to spiritual beliefs and practices to find inner strength and help **cope with difficult questions around meaning and feelings**, such as:

- despair, **hopelessness, grief**
- sense of **disconnection**/isolation
- abandonment** by God/Higher Power
- existential **uncertainty**
- spiritual **guilt/shame**, questioning one's ultimate worth.

# Questions that may arise about life, meaning and the significant or sacred.

- ❖ *Why me?*
- ❖ *What caused this?*
- ❖ *What do I do now? How do I go on?*
- ❖ *Who am I now?*
- ❖ *What will happen to me after I die?*





# Tools to help cultivate meaning & hope in the face of illness

- ❖ Guided imagery e.g. Imagining strength, wellness
- ❖ Progressive relaxation
- ❖ Mindful breathing; prayer or contemplation
- ❖ Inspirational reading/movies/music
- ❖ Cultivate love of self (e.g. mindful self-compassion practice)
- ❖ Meaning-oriented-therapy (spiritual health care, spiritually focused therapy, spiritual direction etc.)

**NOTE: personal to each of us and may change over time**

# Traditional Indigenous healing practices

For many Indigenous Peoples, their **traditional beliefs and practices form an integral part of their being and is a way of life**. Traditional healing practices to sustain spiritual wellbeing are individual for each person and may include:

- traditional teachings
- use of natural herbs
- sacred ceremonies
- song and dance
- vision quest
- prayer
- sweat lodge, and the healing circle.

# Not all spirituality is healthy

**Negative spiritual and religious beliefs** can cause distress and interfere with recovery/ increase the burden of illness if they:

- ❖ enhance **shame, excessive guilt**, etc. (Pargament 1998)
- ❖ **violate the “relatedness** on which spirituality is based... to other people, the environment, one’s God or the numinous....” (Griffith & Griffith 2002)

# Part IV

## Spiritual health care



# Goals of Spiritual Health Care

- ❖ Addresses spiritual needs to facilitate recovery of the patient as a *person* amidst health challenges
- ❖ Addresses matters of meaning, connectedness and hope



# What are “spiritual needs”?

Spiritual needs include: (O’Brien 1999)

- the need to find meaning in the midst of illness and suffering
- the need to affirm relationships to self, others, nature, the significant or sacred, and
- the need for the realization of transcendent values such as hope and creativity, compassion, faith, peace, trust, courage and love

# Spiritual Health Care Practitioners

- ❖ Specialized knowledge in **how a person's spirituality & religion impacts their health and health care.**
- ❖ Fluent in the language of **meaning, hope and compassion, suffering and loss.**
- ❖ **Trained to assess and address spiritual needs and resources** as part of the interdisciplinary health care team.
- ❖ Spiritual health care for **patients *and* their family** throughout the healing journey.
- ❖ Supports sources of **spiritual strength**

# Spiritual health care is safe care

- **respects the dignity and worth of each person**, respectful of all the ways that individuals seek and find deep meaning and connection, whether religious, philosophical, agnostic or atheistic
- ***inclusive*** of culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability/disability, social disadvantage, personal experience and other characteristics



# A compassionate strengths-based relationship

- ❖ **Investment of time in deep and specialized listening to beliefs and values, fears, hopes and dreams, getting to know the person beyond their health challenges**
- ❖ **Incorporates spiritual practices as appropriate**
- ❖ **Support for specific religious or spiritual restrictions that may arise – may refer to community clergy of choice, or to a Indigenous Spiritual/Cultural Care Provider to facilitate access traditional healing practices**

# Spiritual health care is *not*

- just about religious beliefs and practices
- about imposing or controlling of particular beliefs and values on another, either explicitly *or implicitly*

# Enhancing whole person health care

- ❖ Studies show that those accessing health care systems want health care providers to address their spirituality.
- ❖ The recognition of the value of spiritual health care enables our health care system to really focus on the whole person.



# Recovering the Sacred



*The recovery of the sacred is not about becoming "something more." It is not even about "fixing" yourself..... Recovering the sacred is remembering something we've forgotten, something we may have hidden from ourselves. It is about uncovering and discovering the innate wholeness in ourselves and in the world.*

- Rachel Naomi Remen, MD

## **This resource was developed by Manitoba's Spiritual Health Care Partners including representatives from the following organizations:**

- Canadian Association of Spiritual Care
- Catholic Health Association of Manitoba-Interfaith Health Care Association of Manitoba
- CancerCare Manitoba
- Health Sciences Centre
- Interlake Eastern Regional Health Authority
- Manitoba Multifaith Council
- Northern Health Region
- Prairie Mountain Region
- Selkirk Mental Health Centre
- Southern Health-Santé Sud
- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

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