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Is Spirituality an Important Issue in Pharmacotherapy?

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Many people encounter ill-health occasionally and when serious, anxiety is often provoked and both the person that is ill as well as the relatives and friends become very worried. In most cases, the early thoughts are centered around the medications that will be useful, who will properly recommend the right medications and where the medications can be obtained. In Africa today, patients' realities and the pursuit of remedies to their ill-health are moving toward a new alignment. The interest in both *spirituality* and the use of medicines is growing, with their inclusion in both daily life and in health care. This editorial highlights how *spirituality* and medications can harness each other to create a better healthy experience for the sick.

Although the importance of considering an individual's *spirituality* in the use of medicines has been emphasized over the past decade, a clear definition of *spirituality* in this respect has been difficult. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "of the spirit or soul; religious, divine, inspired; refined, sensitive". Nevertheless, *spirituality* has been defined as "a set of conscious/unconscious beliefs and values underlying the motivation and reasons for undertaking any task or occupation"¹⁻³. The word "connectiveness" has often been used when discussing the concept of *spirituality*. According to Tansi³,

"connectiveness relates to the relationships we share with ourselves, others, nature and/or God and "gives meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being". Furthermore, both vertical and horizontal components of *spirituality* have been identified⁴. The vertical component involves a person's relationship with a higher power (experiencing God as a transcendent and/or personal being), while the horizontal component is one's relationship with self, others and environment – often referred to as humanistic values and beliefs. However, *spirituality* may be defined as the search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to a belief in God, or some form of higher power.

In health care delivery system, *pharmacotherapy* is the treatment of diseases with the use of medicines⁵. A critical aspect of *pharmacotherapy* is adherence to medications. Adherence (compliance) here refers to the degree to which a patient follows a treatment regimen. It requires that the prescription is obtained promptly and the medicines prescribed are taken as prescribed in terms of dose, dosing interval, and duration of treatment. It is known that only about 50 percent of patients who leave a physician's office with a prescription take their medicines as directed. The most

common reasons for not adhering to treatment (non-adherence) include frequent dosing, denial of illness, poor comprehension of the benefits of taking the medicine, and cost.

The separation between *spirituality* and physical and mental health as well as *pharmacotherapy* has been shrinking for years. Just as certain *thinking patterns* may lead to disease symptoms (by giving a distorted picture of what is going on in the person's life, thereby causing anxiety, depression or anger), *spirituality* has both social and psychological dimensions. It plays a role not only in medication adherence but in the recognition and acceptance of ill-health⁶. There is increasing evidence that *spirituality* can help people prevent and recover from mental and physical ill-health. The results of the evaluation of over 1,600 studies and reviews⁷⁻⁸ have revealed that the relationship between *spirituality* and religion to health and well-being are threefold – it aids prevention, speeds recovery and fosters composure in the face of ill-health.

The concept of *spirituality* and *pharmacotherapy* has a certain synergy as they both espouse a view of the world that recognizes the importance of the whole person. Increasingly, people who are sick want their values and beliefs attended to, perhaps, choosing a therapy as a pathway to nourish their sense of the spiritual⁹. They want the appropriate health professionals to help them define honest and realistic expectations¹⁰. Also, the nature of the health professional-client relationship has been found to account for up to about 45 percent of the effectiveness of therapy. In a holistic way, therefore, the pharmacist and other health care professionals need to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of ill-health and well-being in order to provoke a holistic and person-centred intervention, maximize the effectiveness of medications and achieve a desired therapeutic outcomes.

In conclusion therefore, *spirituality* is implicit to management of ill-health¹¹ and *pharmacotherapy*. Addressing the spiritual

needs of patients can enhance their adherence to medications and recovery from illness. Nevertheless, the appropriateness of addressing spiritual issues should be based on the prevailing situation – let the patient/client bring it up. All health professionals should respect their patients/clients' cultures and beliefs. Respect, someone to listen, rights of dignity and choice, sensitivity of staff to culture, lifestyle or religion, space, and recognition of personal beliefs and values are imperative in acknowledging a patient/client's *spirituality* requirement¹².

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