

Exploring Spiritual Needs of Taiwanese Inpatients with Advanced Cancer and Their Family Caregivers

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Abstract : This study explores the spiritual needs of inpatients with advanced cancer and their family caregivers in one southern regional teaching hospital in Taiwan and elucidates the differences and similarities of spiritual needs between them. Little research reports the different phases of spiritual needs and the potential impact of Chinese cultural values on the spiritual needs. Qualitative inquiry was used. Twenty-one patients with advanced cancer and twenty-two family caregivers were recruited. During hospitalization, all participants identified spiritual needs both the palliative phase and the dying phase: (a) the need to foster faith/confidence and hope for medicine and/or God; (b) to understand the meaning and values of life; (c) to experience more reciprocal human love and forgiveness; and (d) to obey God's/Heaven will. Furthermore, the differences of spiritual needs between patients with advanced cancer and their family caregivers are as follows: (a) family caregivers emphasized the need to inform relatives and say goodbye in order to die peacefully; (b) patients highlighted a need to maintain a certain physical appearance in order to preserve their dignity; nurture one's willpower; learn about the experiences of cancer survivors; and identify one's own life experience for understanding the meaning and values of life. Moreover, the dissimilarity of spiritual needs is that the patients pointed out the need to understand God's will during the palliative treatment phase. However, the family caregivers identified the need to forgive each other, and inform relatives and say goodbye to patients in the dying phase. This research has shown that the needs of meaning/values of life and facing death peacefully are different between two groups. Health professionals will be encouraged to detect and to develop individualized care strategies to meet spiritual needs.

Keywords : advanced cancer, Chinese culture, family caregivers, qualitative research, spiritual needs

Conference Title : ICNCTN 2017 : International Conference on Nursing Care and General Nursing

Conference Location : San Francisco, United States

Conference Dates : June 07-08, 2017