

The Spiritual Distress of Women Coping with the End of Life and Death of Their Spouses

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Abstract : Many nurses have concerns about the difficulties of providing spiritual care for ethnic-Chinese patients and family members within their cultural context. This is due to a lack of knowledge and training. Most family caregivers are female. There has been little research exploring the potential impact of Chinese cultural values on the spiritual distress of couple dyadic participants in Taiwan. This study explores the spiritual issues of Taiwanese women coping with their husband's advanced cancer during palliative care to death. Qualitative multiple case studies were used. Data was collected through participant observation and in-depth face-to-face interviews. Transcribed interview data was analyzed by using qualitative content analysis. Three couples were recruited from a community-based rural hospital in Taiwan where the husbands were hospitalized in a medical ward. Four spiritual distress themes emerged from the analysis: (1) A personal conflict in trying to come to terms with love and forgiveness; the inability to forgive their husband's mistakes; and, lack of their family's love and support. (2) A feeling of hopelessness due to advanced cancer, such as a feeling of disappointment in their destiny and karma, including expressing doubt on survival. (3) A feeling of uncertainty in facing death peacefully, such as fear of facing the unknown world; and, (4) A feeling of doubt causing them to question the meaning and values in their lives. This research has shown that caregivers needed family support, friends, social welfare, and the help of their religion to meet their spiritual needs in coping within the final stages of life and death. The findings of this study could assist health professionals to detect the spiritual distress of ethnic-Chinese patients and caregivers in the context of their cultural or religious background as early as possible.

Keywords : advanced cancer, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, qualitative research, spiritual distress

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