

Reciprocal (Mutual) Healing in Healthcare

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A core belief concerning healing in healthcare has evolved over centuries as a result of reflection on the human condition. This core belief is sometimes overlooked in modern healthcare due to an overemphasis on clinical innovation and efficiency by administrators and governmental agencies. Certainly, the advances in the science of medicine have offered great hope for the alleviation of the sufferings and fears that accompany disease and illness for many insured and uninsured people, but these advances, while revolutionary, are not at the core of humanity's belief about healing.

Simply stated the core belief is this: there is an essential harmonic balance of care for the body, mind, and spirit that is essential for the healing of the human person. This balance when achieved fosters well-being and healing. This simple realization is core to the success of today's complex healthcare, especially with its challenging environmental, cultural, and personal realities. If modern medicine focuses on the body due consideration of the mind and the spirit, it threatens to interrupt the harmonic balance that is at the natural core of healing in the human person.

Above all, if modern medicine excludes the role of the spirit, usually framed in the form of a spirituality or belief system, it takes away one of the primary ingredients necessary for healing, including the recovery from or submission to disease and illness. For this reason, the practice of medicine can never exclude the role of spirituality as an essential part of the healing process. The inclusion of spirituality acts as a fertile ground in order to heal, inspire, and transform the patient, the healthcare professional, the culture, and the environment of healthcare.

Spirituality includes beliefs that are expressed in behaviors, rituals, and

practice. It is central to thinking, feeling and behaving. Spirituality, usually influenced by codified and organized religious traditions and beliefs, contains the corporate and individualized wisdom about the depth and breadth of the human potential for well-being. It also offers assistance when facing the realities of life and death. Indeed, every person evaluated and treated by a healthcare professional brings some of his or her unique coping and belief resources to the patient-healthcare professional relationship. In turn, the professional is challenged to bring his or her spirituality to the relationship, consciously or not.

Spirituality, in all cultures, is a spiritual intelligence or wisdom that individuals and communities seek to embrace. Spirituality is built on the wisdom that men and women discover as a result of their search to unravel the ultimate questions of life and death. Their main aim is always to find the delicate harmony necessary for well-being.

Spirituality, then, is a practice of living that is a product of making ethical, religious, physical, cognitive, and emotional decisions in life. Sometimes, this wisdom is revealed with the aid of sacred writings and tradition which is the collective wisdom of human beings as practiced and handed down through the ages. Sometimes, it is a result of a reflective life based on a desire to understand the transcendent and the ultimate questions and answers of life. For most people, it is an integration of the two. What is clear, however, is that everyone develops a spirituality or way of relating to his or her emotional and spiritual self. This is especially true in healthcare experiences where illness interrupts ways of living and healing gives hope for the future.

The care of one's health is a lifelong process and possessing a mature spiritual attitude is a part of the success that integrated treatment affords the patient and professional. The individual's constant and unrelenting search for spirituality results in the development of virtues such as wisdom, courage, gratitude, and hope. In turn, these virtues affect both personal and professional experiences in life and, ultimately, help the person to face the reality of mortality.

Thus, one's spirituality is at the core of healthy living and healing because it is the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life—integration leading to self-transcendence based on the ultimate value one perceives.

A term that expresses this special relationship between patient and the healthcare professional is reciprocal healing (a function of integrative medicine). In part, the statement regarding reciprocal healing, developed by Institute of Medicine, Education, and Spirituality at Ochsner (IMESO) and published in the Ochsner Journal, states:

Any illness has the potential to change the patient, and the healing experience has the potential to change the healer. In this reciprocal relationship both the patient and the healthcare professional can find meaning and wholeness through enlightenment, compassion, and wisdom. Establishing such a reciprocal healing relationship requires healthcare professionals to go beyond the sole consideration of the mechanisms of disease and illness and to see each patient as a person—a unique human being. When this reciprocity occurs, both the one seeking healing and the healer enter, consciously or not, into a spiritual—a self-transcendent—realm.

A truly integrative healthcare system supports reciprocal healing in an intentional manner by providing the education and support necessary to keep people healthy in body, mind, and spirit. It understands that healing and well-being are enhanced by bringing together the wisdom of science and reason, together with compassionate care and spiritual support.

Integrative healthcare professionals attempt to care for the whole person and not merely part of the person—the illness. Illness has the power to change not only the person being treated, but also his or her family members, friends, and, ultimately, the treatment providers. It is for this reason that enlightened medical professionals not only talk about the mechanics of disease and treatment of an illness with the patient, family members, and caregivers, but also attempt to integrate the healing that comes from compassionate, reciprocal care. Consequently, diagnosis and treatment of an illness demands a radical look into all aspects of one's body, mind, and

lifestyle, including spirituality and belief. Sharing the experience of illness and healing takes the patient and medical professional, willing or not, into the realm of spirituality and self-transcendence.

Scholars now widely recognize that the incorporation of spirituality into treatment assists both the patient and the caregiver in the healing process. This is evidenced by the fact that major academic hospital systems have established institutes for the study of health and spirituality. For example, George Washington University has developed the Institute for Spirituality and Health, Duke University has developed the Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health and Columbia University now offers a degree program in spirituality and psychology. Through scientific research, these institutions and many others have begun to find evidence for the positive relationships between spirituality and healthcare behaviors.

In 1952, Dr. Alton Ochsner, one of the founders of the Ochsner Health, reminded the staff about their responsibility toward patients. He said: “While working for the benefit of humanity, let us not forget that our work is also for the benefit of the patients, and the individual men and women who seek us out in their hours of trial. They need compassion and understanding as well as scientific care.”

In response to Dr. Ochsner’s call for integrative care and to emphasize integrative care of mind, body, and spirit, IMESO was established in 2011. It is a grassroots movement, staffed by employee volunteers, and based on Ochsner’s mission “to serve heal, lead, educate, and innovate.” It supports and cooperates with existing programs and services, including those involving physicians, nursing, spiritual care, medical education, clinical research, bioethics, palliative care, medical departments, staff, and administration to emphasize Alton Ochsner’s concern for patients.

IMESO’s mission can be captured in three words: heal, inspire and transform. It will assist all to fulfill its healthcare’s mission of patient-centered

healing as Ochsner fulfill its mission of service, healing, leadership, education,
and innovation.

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