

# The Healthcare Workplace: Spirituality as a Pathway to Health and Professional Service

By Rev. Anthony De Conciliis, C.S.C., Ph. D.

The Institute of Medicine, Education, and Spirituality at Ochsner (IMESO)

**Abstract:** The healthcare workplace is experiencing major transitions. Healthcare professionals are subject to workplace changes which test the resilience of their professional and personal character strengths. The inner life of each person, in many instances, is the reservoir of strength in the face of many external and internal pressures. With a concentration on the development of the inner life, as found in the discovery and development of one's spirituality, a new attitude is born for coping and growth. In this essay a definition of spirituality, which supports a value-based organization, is proposed for the benefit of all.

The investigation into the nature and purpose of spirituality is essential to human growth and healing because it impacts the major and minor decisions one makes, whether consciously or unconsciously, throughout the lifespan. This also extends beyond the human person to the organizations and institutions in which human live and work. Spirituality is especially integral to the healing professions of religion and medicine.

It is proposed that spirituality is composed of positive emotions or virtues such as awe, love, trust, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, joy, and hope. Valliant said that "Humanity's task is to pay attention to them (positive emotions) for they are the source of our spiritual being and the key to our cultural evolutionary process."<sup>1</sup> Understood and practiced, one's spirituality offers a roadmap or wisdom-guide in life for growthful decision making.<sup>2</sup>

These decisions include attitudes and choices for careers, relationships, service, and moral behaviors through the practice of virtues such as compassion, endurance, and integrity. These decisions are spiritual decisions which lead to meaning, interconnection, and values in life, the ingredients for a productive and happy workplace spirit. The term, workplace spirituality, is now commonly used in businesses of all types including healthcare. The outcomes of this spirit attitude are realized in personal and professional growth.

The health of an organization can be measured by the positive attributions of those who work within it. These employees define a healthy workplace as one where there is commitment, job satisfaction and a work-life balance. Further they define themselves as those

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<sup>1</sup> Valliant, G. (2008). Positive Emotions, Spirituality and the Practice of Psychiatry. *Mens Sana Monographs*. 6(1) p. 48-62

<sup>2</sup> De Conciliis, A. and Kinsella, J. *Every Decision You Make is a Spiritual One*. Paulist Press, 1995.

who can integrate the practice of virtues in the workplace as a source of strength and meaning.<sup>3</sup> Below are examples of the integration of virtues and workplace attitudes in healthcare.

1. They practice the virtue of temperance when they realize that strengths of humility, prudence and forgiveness are of even greater importance than recognitions, titles, authority, and possessions.
2. They practice the virtue of humanity when they realize that strengths of kindness, generosity, benevolence, and social intelligence can affirm the importance of meaning and purpose despite major changes, even sometime in an atmosphere where there is chaos and exhaustive demands.
3. They practice the virtues of wisdom and courage when realize that the strengths of creativity, curiosity, and authenticity offer them inner authority, personal transformations, and accurate perspectives.
4. They practice the virtue of transcendence when they realize that strengths of gratitude, hope, and optimism helps them to recognize the sacred dimensions of reality.
5. They practice the virtue of justice when they realize the need to possess attitudes of social responsibility, servant leadership, fairness, and equity.<sup>4</sup>

The development and practice of virtue in all professions, especially in medicine, demands a conscious effort in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> This effort will help to insure an integrated and fulfilling life. The importance of consciously including spirituality into the practice of medicine and education is an essential aspect for healing and, as a result, enlightened healthcare providers offer integrated, holistic care, which includes the care of the inner life at work.

### Spirituality in the Workplace

In the past, the exclusive goal for the practice of spirituality was the development of a personal spiritual life which, in many cases, was not able to be acknowledged in the workplace. It was considered a private experience between what people held to be the transcendent or the ultimate concern and the person. conferences on spirituality and business have multiplied. For example, the Leadership, Values, and Spirituality Conference at the Harvard Business School

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<sup>3</sup> Burack, E. H. (1999) Spirituality in the Workplace. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(4), 280-291.

<sup>4</sup> Garg, N. Workplace Spirituality and Employee Well-being: An Empirical Exploration. *Journal of Human Values*, 2017, volume 23, 129-147. Peterson, C., Seligman, M. *Character Strengths and Virtues*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2004,

<sup>5</sup> Kotzee, B, Ignatowicz, A., Thomas H. Virtue in Medical Practice: An Exploratory Study. *HEC Forum*, 2017:29(1): 1-18, 2-15.

challenged business leaders to lead with integrity, reflect on their spiritual values and create a fulfilling workplace.

More and more meaning and purpose are highly esteemed values in the workplace, as much as is compensation.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the definition and practice of spirituality has become more prominent as the present generation responds to its socio-political-religious environments which seek to focus on human experience as the existential ground for personal and professional growth. For example, in research on workplace spirit at Ochsner Health, the role of the inner life in decision making was one of the highest rated variables along with meaning, alignment of values and connection to others.<sup>7</sup>

Workplace spirituality has the following characteristics related to meaning and productivity:<sup>8</sup>

1. A framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture of the workplace
2. A climate that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process
3. A process which facilitates a sense of being connected to others
4. An experience that provides feelings of completeness in and at the job
5. A goal to have positive attitudes and relationships with the world
6. A resultant of health, happiness, empowerment, inner peace, truth, good relationship for self and others.

Achieving these characteristics demands openness on the part of both administration and employees. Moreover, many researchers have found that that a climate of spirituality at work is beneficial both for the employees and the administration. Wong asserted that "A healthy dose of spirituality and meaning at the workplace is good for business, because it improves morale and productivity."

#### Spirituality as an Academic Reality

Spirituality has taken on a new identity and become both an academic object of study and a path to meaning in all aspects of living. In this sense, spirituality is a lived experience for all aspects of living. Its investigation allows for the expression of new ways to understand core beliefs of religious traditions and helps to make applications in daily life to enhance well-being.

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<sup>6</sup> Kolodinsky, R. W., Giacalone, R. A., Jurkiewicz, C. L. Workplace Values and Outcomes: Exploring Personal, Organizational, and Interactive Workplace Spirituality. *Journal of Business Ethics* (2008) 81:465-480.

<sup>7</sup> De Conciliis, A. (2016). A Measure of Workplace Spirit. Ochsner Health System. Unpublished research.

<sup>8</sup> Giacalone, R. A., and Jurkiewicz, C. L. (2004). A values framework for measuring the impact of workplace spirituality on organizational performance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 49, 129-142. Wong, P. Spirituality and Meaning at Work (Sept. 1, 2003) <http://www.drpaulwong.com/spirituality-and-meaning-at-work>

Spirituality can be generally understood as the process of embracing, celebrating, and voicing all the connections within and beyond a person. Through the practice of spirituality, a person lives the daily journey with more meaning, purpose, direction, and values. A person's spirituality is strengthened by daily connections to others, and in meditative acknowledgement of the environment, the mysterious universe, and the transcendent beyond.

Current research and practice are uncovering scientific evidence that spirituality affects a person's well-being and healing.<sup>9</sup> It responds to human needs that go beyond technical and process orientations of interaction. Multi-disciplinary scholars, including those from the social and natural sciences, have made the study of spirituality a distinct object of study to support a holistic view resulting in well-being, at home and the social environment. This research is challenging because spirituality of its very nature is progressive and developmental. To validly make conclusions, these studies should be longitudinal in nature, using both quantitative and qualitative scientific method to track the valid impact of spirituality on the body, mind, and spirit in all circumstances.

The natural development of spirituality is a response to an instinctive human desire which is to find meaning and a way "to spiritualize" each human action, thought, and feeling.<sup>10</sup> By living a virtuous life, one can care for personal and professional life with implications for religious experience and the brain.<sup>11</sup> Spirituality is best described in virtue terms such as kindness, fairness, courage, and meaning. Virtues which energize a spirituality bring spiritual and physical fulfillment. Innovative genetic, neurological and brain studies are pointing to possible neural connections resulting in behaviors such as cooperation, compassion, empathy, and other important behaviors related to well-being.

Spirituality can be defined as "*a profound and authentic desire in humanity to find wholeness during fragmentation; for community in the face of isolation and loneliness; for liberating transcendence; for meaning in life; for values that endure*".<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, human beings are spirit-centered individuals living in a complex physical world. To aid in the

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<sup>9</sup> Daaleman, Timothy P. and Frey, Bruce B. The Spirituality Index of Well-Being: A New Instrument for Health-Related Quality-of-Life Research. *Annals of Family Medicine*. September/October 2004, Vol. 2, No. 5. Sloan, Richard. *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine*. St. Martin's Press, New York. 2006. Williams, Joshua. *Religion, Spirituality Heal Patients*, University of Chicago, 2011. Koenig, Harold. *Aging and God: Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health in Midlife and Later Years*. Haworth Press. 1994. Peterman, A. H., Fitchett, G., Brady, M. J., Hernandez, L. Measuring Spiritual Well-Being in People with Cancer: The Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy-Spiritual Well-Being Scale (FACIT-Sp). *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 2002, 24 (1): 49-58.

<sup>10</sup> Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death*, New York: Macmillan, 1973, p. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Loehr, J., Schwartz, T. The making of a corporate athlete. *Harvard Business Review*. 2001; 32(2) 120-128. Spirituality and the Brain: A Scientific Approach to Religious Experience (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHe2oqugSn>)

<sup>12</sup> Schneiders, Sandra, "Spirituality in the Academy," *Theological Studies*, 50, 1989, p.696

development of a meaningful life, then, it is important to identify and develop a personal understanding and commitment to the spiritual life as a result of reflection, meditation on lived experience, and the incorporation one experiences in a religious tradition.

The study of spirituality can encompass in its simplest form the day to day lived experience of the person acknowledging it. The true object for the study of spirituality is something that is fundamental and necessary to the human condition, lived experience.<sup>13</sup> In this context, the word is universally understood as an intensely personal experience; as a way of visioning without being theoretical; as prophetic without being partisan, and as incarnational (experienced in a concrete spirit-filled creation) without being too worldly. It stresses a personal response and an interior commitment that radically changes the person in the process.<sup>14</sup>

In this way, the word spirituality refers to wholeness, including the physical, emotional, social, political, and religious. It describes a religious experience emanating from lived experiences. Spirituality is viewed as a science in that it studies specific behaviors and sentiments, such as empathy, gratitude, compassion, courage, connections, forgiveness, joy, kindness, openness, and zeal. The practice of these behaviors moves people from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. As such, these behaviors and sentiments affect the interaction between people and can be subjected to critical scrutiny in the academic arena. So, for example, is a patient's well-being, to say nothing of patient satisfaction scores, improve with a compassionate or empathetic physician or nurse as over against one who is technically excellent but interpersonally lacking?

It is important that healthcare systems adopt a definition of spirituality that all can agree is capable of representing the broad range of people who work and use its services -- one that cuts across religions and cultures and is capable of measurement. Sandra Schneiders, a theologian noted for her work in spirituality as an academic discipline, formulated a definition of spirituality based on lived experience that is subject to measurement and investigation and cuts across religious traditions. From her research and reflection, she concluded that in the context of a lived experience "*spirituality is the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.*"<sup>15</sup>

This definition encompasses a pluralistic range of religious traditions, beliefs and practices ingrained in the human community. In addition, her definition, one among hundreds, includes themes that are commonly accepted by many academic scholars. They are that

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 676.

<sup>14</sup> Heagle, John, "A New Public Piety: Reflections on Spirituality," Church 1 (1985), p. 53

<sup>15</sup> Schneiders, op. cit., p. 684

spirituality is “progressive (always open to further understanding based on reflection), consciously pursued, a personal integration, through self-transcendence with and toward the horizon of an ultimate concern.”<sup>16</sup>

The mission of The Institute of Medicine, Education, and Spirituality at Ochsner focuses on the benefits brought to bear on healthcare practice by the consideration of spirituality as a beneficial asset in healing and meaningfulness. In order to communicate in a common language about the nature of spirituality, we will suggest the use of the Schneider’s definition presented above. It is one that is as inclusive as possible without excluding any religious or spiritual tradition. The definition is progressive, consciously pursued, and serves as an integrative factor in everyone.

The next step in the development of the Institute is to formulate a creative exchange of ideas about the benefits of spirituality to foster professionalism, resilience, and wellness.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 684