

The Importance and Applications of Spiritual Care in Health Services: Patients' Need for Spiritual Support

Sağlık Hizmetlerinde Manevi Bakımın Önemi ve Uygulamaları: Hastaların Manevi Desteğe İhtiyacı

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual care in health care is an important approach that aims to take into account the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of patients as well as their physical treatment. Spiritual care is a necessary practice to improve the quality of life of patients and to support them emotionally and psychologically. This article discusses the importance of spiritual care in healthcare and its role in meeting the spiritual support needs of patients. Spiritual care offers a meaningful treatment process not only for patients with religious beliefs but for all individuals. Spiritual support provided by nurses, doctors and other health professionals plays an important role in helping patients cope with anxiety, stress and fear of death. Furthermore, spiritual care practices are vital to alleviate patients' feelings of loneliness, help them rediscover the meaning of life and enable them to cope with the dying process. This article discusses the integration of spiritual care in healthcare, the ways in which this care is practiced, and the ethical and cultural sensitivity requirements. As a result, it is emphasized that spiritual care should be accepted as an integral part of healthcare services, and that patients' need for spiritual support should not be ignored in the treatment process.

Keywords: Spiritual Care, Holistic Health, Patient-Centered Care, Psychological Support, Religion.

ÖZET

Sağlık hizmetlerinde ruhsal bakım, hastaların fiziksel tedavilerinin yanı sıra duygusal, psikolojik ve ruhsal ihtiyaçlarını da hesaba katmayı amaçlayan önemli bir yaklaşımdır. Ruhsal bakım, hastaların yaşam kalitesini iyileştirmek ve onları duygusal ve psikolojik olarak desteklemek için gerekli bir uygulamadır. Bu makale, sağlık hizmetlerinde ruhsal bakımın önemini ve hastaların ruhsal destek ihtiyaçlarını karşılamadaki rolünü tartışmaktadır. Ruhsal bakım, yalnızca dini inançlara sahip hastalar için değil, tüm bireyler için anlamlı bir tedavi süreci sunar. Hemşireler, doktorlar ve diğer sağlık profesyonelleri tarafından sağlanan ruhsal destek, hastaların kaygı, stres ve ölüm korkusuyla başa çıkmalarına yardımcı olmada önemli bir rol oynar. Dahası, ruhsal bakım uygulamaları hastaların yalnızlık duygularını hafifletmek, hayatın anlamını yeniden keşfetmelerine yardımcı olmak ve ölüm süreciyle başa çıkmalarını sağlamak için hayati öneme sahiptir. Bu makale, ruhsal bakımın sağlık hizmetlerine entegrasyonunu, bu bakımın uygulanma biçimlerini ve etik ve kültürel duyarlılık gereksinimlerini tartışmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, ruhsal bakımın sağlık hizmetlerinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak kabul edilmesi gerektiği ve hastaların ruhsal desteğe olan ihtiyaçlarının tedavi sürecinde göz ardı edilmemesi gerektiği vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Manevi Bakım, Bütünsel Sağlık, Hasta Merkezli Bakım, Psikolojik Destek, Din.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern healthcare is based on a holistic approach that is not limited to the treatment of physical ailments, but also aims to cover the spiritual, emotional and emotional needs of patients. The disease process can have profound effects on individuals, not only physically but also psychologically and spiritually. Especially in serious or chronic illnesses, patients face difficulties such as questioning the meaning of their lives, anxiety about the future and decreased quality of life. In this context, spiritual care is an important dimension of care that aims to support patients in issues such as the meaning of life, facing death, coping with pain and loss. Spiritual care does not only focus on improving the physical health of patients, but also aims to respond to their spiritual needs, alleviate their existential concerns and support their inner peace. By respecting patients' spiritual values and beliefs, this approach contributes to individuals feeling more integrated and secure in the health care process. Increasing spiritual care practices in hospitals, nursing homes and other health institutions, training of health personnel on this subject and improving their empathy skills with patients play an important role in strengthening the psychological resilience of patients.

In this study, the importance of spiritual care in health services and the place of this care in meeting the psychological support needs of patients will be discussed.

Definition and Scope of Spiritual Care

Spirituality is related to spiritual life and encompasses all non-material entities and concepts (Seyyar, 2015). According to another definition, spirituality is “the dimension of meaning behind matter; abstract concepts give meaning to concrete realities. The construction of what we know and material things with abstract ideas reveals the essence of everything” (Tarhan, 2009). Spirituality, as a broad concept that is difficult to perceive with the senses, can create different associations for each individual (Karataş, 2015). Jung (1998) saw spirituality and religion as an important function of the human psyche and considered psychological approaches that do not include this dimension as incomplete. Psychologists such as Allport, Maslow, Fromm and Erikson have stated that spirituality contributes positively to the development of the individual (Ekşi & Kaya, 2016).

Spiritual support refers to the entirety of spiritual services aimed at alleviating an individual's psycho-social difficulties and offers assistance to protect their material and spiritual well-being. This support strengthens individuals against spiritual threats (Seyyar & Genç, 2010). In

psycho-social functioning, spiritual support is significant as a proactive resource for coping with stress(Ekşi & Kaya, 2016). Spiritual care is a psycho-social-based care service aimed at supporting individuals in need, such as the elderly, disabled, and chronically ill, spiritually and increasing their attachment to life(Seyyar & Genç, 2010). Spiritual care is seen as a field that utilizes spiritual therapy methods to strengthen the bond between individuals and their spiritual lives while reducing spiritual risks(Seyyar, 2010). Particularly in the United States and European countries, spiritual care has been recognized as a profession, leading to the development of "Spiritual Counseling" programs and the establishment of educational institutions through the contributions of clergy, universities, and volunteer organizations(Kavas, 2013).

Throughout human history, spiritual care and counseling have played a crucial role in treating psychological disorders since ancient times. Historically, religious institutions served as primary resources for such needs, and clergy employed spiritual care approaches to treat psychological illnesses. The development of modern spiritual counseling is rooted in Anton Boisen's pastoral work. Boisen laid the foundation of this discipline with his pioneering research in spiritual and psychological counseling(Koç, 2012).

Relationship between Spirituality and Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as not only the absence of disease and disability but also a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being(Dünya Sağlık Örgütü(DSÖ), 1948). This definition supports holistic care by emphasizing that being healthy means being well in all aspects of the individual. With this approach, health is not only the absence of disease; it focuses on addressing the individual holistically with its body, mind, spirit, environment, relationships, social and cultural dimensions. Thus, health includes psychological, social and spiritual elements as well as the biological dimension(Evangelista et al., 2016). It is seen that spiritual practices have a positive effect on individuals' life satisfaction and reduce depression and anxiety symptoms(Doğan, 2018). Spiritual needs are interventions that will fill the spiritual gaps or increase the spiritual power of the individual. Basic spiritual needs include love, hope, trust, truthfulness, purpose of life, search for meaning, creativity, building relationships, gaining experience, forgiveness, emotionality, consolation, worship and prayer(Karasu, 2020). During the disease process, especially during the expectation of death, spiritual needs become more prominent. Patients facing death may

face various emotional pain and spirituality may increase their hopes of coping with this process and recovery(Güzel, 2020).

Healthy Recovery Process and the Role of Spirituality

Religion is a mechanism some peoples use to overcome problems in difficult times(Sabado et al., 2006). The process of illness is also a process in which people turn to religion to overcome it. The main issue here is whether someone accepts religion as a reference to solve their problems. Those who do not see religion as a refuge to cope with the difficult processes in human life and those who accept the possible impact of religion on human life do not look at religious resources in the face of illness in the same way. The degree of dependence on religion and the nature of the person is one of the determining factors when dealing with religion(Ayten & Ensa, 2012). Religious coping strategies stand out as an alternative and effective factor in overcoming problems. Academic research proves the strong influence of religion and spirituality, especially in situations related to illness and stress. Many scientific studies have been conducted on the impact of religion on human life. For example, research on cancer patients focused on the suffering of individuals during their illness. This study shows that religious and non-religious cancer patients do not feel the same pain and suffering, while religious cancer patients experience less suffering throughout the course of their illness(Perez et al., 2008).

The fact that religion increases the mental strength of cancer patients, contributes to optimism in the progression of the disease and to the recovery of patients has led to an increase in research in this field in many Western countries(Çifçi, 2007). There are many studies indicating that religion contributes significantly to patient recovery and stress reduction(Kavas, 2013). In addition, some researchers have found that people who are supported by the concept of religion and beliefs in the fight against stress contribute positively to the resilience of the body(Joshi et al., 2008). The importance of religion in combating stress is one of the issues that should be emphasized. Modern medicine has shown in many scientific studies that stress is one of the main causes of diseases. Although the importance of religious and spiritual psychology in combating stress is supported by scientific research, religious and spiritual psychology has not yet received the necessary attention in health services(Çifta, 2013). Mental needs are more abstract and complex than physical needs and therefore difficult to measure. For this reason, medical care primarily addresses the more visible and measurable physical needs of individuals, while spiritual needs are not given

enough attention. In order to achieve the goal of holistic health, the spiritual needs of patients should be identified and met(Yılmaz et al., 2019).

The need for spiritual care increases at various stages of life, especially in cases of illness. Aging is a universal but very different process leading to decline in all areas, changes in personal values, and personal emotional and social crises(Guerrero-Castaneda & Flores, 2017). Older adults face stressful situations such as illness, pain, suffering and the search for meaning in death. This is called spiritual stress. People with religious beliefs and practices have better control over stressful situations that arise during the aging process. They are not only physically and mentally healthy, but also live longer than people without religious beliefs and practices(Guerrero-Castaneda & Flores, 2017).

Once cancer patients learn about their disease, they accept their illness and begin to evaluate their lives from a new perspective as they learn more. These people often wonder why they got this disease. Evaluating and questioning one's life from a new perspective leads individuals to seek spiritual support. It is reported that cancer patients have increased not only psychological needs but also emotional, mental, physical and social support needs. In particular, the religious beliefs and spiritual needs of patients diagnosed with advanced cancer are seen to be higher than in the early stages of the diagnosis (23). Cancer patients expect treatment and care teams to be informed about the belief system to which they belong and to take their spiritual needs into consideration(Ellington et al., 2017). Meeting the spiritual needs of patients diagnosed with terminal cancer can transform negative thoughts about the disease into positive ones. This prepares the patient to face the disease(Wisesrith et al., 2021).

Study show that people diagnosed with cancer whose spiritual needs are met have lower levels of anxiety and depression, better health, higher hope and quality of life(Bektaş, 2021). Spiritual care makes a significant contribution to children and their families in coping with physical, psychological and social problems related to childhood cancer, but this is less common than in adults(Snıman et al., 2018). The intensive care unit (ICU) is a treatment environment where patients and their families often feel fear and think about the possibility of death(Ho et al., 2018). There are many sources of stress for patients in intensive care unit. These include threats to life, unfamiliar environments, different sleep patterns, inability to exercise due to bed rest, disruption of family routines, intensity of painful procedures, and various treatments and practices(Klimasiński, 2021).

Patients in intensive care experience biological, psychological, social and spiritual symptoms such as anxiety, fear, loneliness, helplessness, fear of death or permanent disability in addition to the physical symptoms of serious illness. This is also true for the relatives of patients who are exposed to difficult conditions during the care of a loved one (Kostak et al., 2010). Traditional medicine, which primarily aims to treat patients' underlying diseases, may not be sufficient to alleviate the burden on patients and their families (Ho et al., 2018). In intensive care settings where suffering and death are common, critically ill patients and their families need a source of solace and hope (Kostak et al., 2010). Intensive care patients and their families often turn to spirituality and religion for support (Ho et al., 2018). Spiritual care aims to comfort patients and their families by meeting their spiritual needs and is an essential component of quality intensive care (Ho et al., 2018; Kostak et al., 2010). The American College of Critical Care Medicine has developed and implemented guidelines for spiritual and religious support in intensive care units (Kostak et al., 2010). There is increasing evidence that addressing the psychological needs of patients in intensive care and their families can improve health outcomes, including quality of life. Spiritual care enhances patients' quality of life, satisfaction with medical care, and helps prevent or reduce the negative psychological effects of hospitalization. Moreover, spiritual care positively impacts the motivation, work efficiency, and well-being of intensive care teams, reducing the risk of burnout (Ho et al., 2018; Kostak et al., 2010).

The Importance of Spiritual Care Services in Health Services

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health not only as physical health but also as a whole with spiritual well-being. It is argued that in order for an individual to be fully healthy, his/her spiritual health should be in balance as well as physical health (Metin et al., 2023). In this context, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) emphasizes the importance of considering the spiritual beliefs of patients while providing nursing care.

Florence Nightingale, the founder of the nursing profession, advocated the holistic care approach of nursing while addressing the concepts of health and disease. Nightingale stated that the nurse combines the concepts of professionalism and autonomy with holistic care (Akgün Şahin & Kardeş Özdemir, 2016). This view states that spiritual needs play an important role for the protection of health (Aydın, 2022). The American Holistic Nurses Association (ANHA) defines health as the balance between body, mind and spirit (Aydın, 2022). The holistic approach considers the human being as a whole and argues that a problem

or deficiency in one dimension may negatively affect other dimensions(Bayındır & Biçer, 2019).

The health sector plays an important role with the mission of protecting the physical and mental health of individuals. In this sector, it is critical that patients' religious observances are respected and their spiritual needs are met. Healthcare organizations take various measures to provide care in accordance with patients' religious beliefs. These practices are essential to ensure that patients have a holistic health experience and respect their religious freedom. This approach aims to ensure that healthcare services are not only concerned with physical health, but also with spiritual and spiritual needs. Article 5 of the Patient Rights Regulation sets out the principles to be followed in the provision of health services. This article emphasizes that health services should be provided in a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and that the right to life should be respected at every stage. It is also stated that the individual has the right to protect his/her life and spiritual existence and that this right cannot be restricted by any institution(Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1998).

Article 38 of the same regulation states that health institutions must allow patients to fulfill their religious obligations. Institutions may call a chaplain to meet the spiritual needs of patients by respecting their religious beliefs. It is also stated that a chaplain will be assigned for patients in agony without a request(Sağlık Bakanlığı, 1998).

In a study conducted in the USA, significant differences were found between patients who received spiritual support and those who did not. In heart patients, the mortality rate of those who did not receive religious support was three times higher than those who did. In addition, patients who practiced prayer had lower blood pressure levels and lower levels of depression than those who did not. Suicide rates were also four times higher among the non-religious. Worshipful women who underwent hip surgery recovered faster than non-religious women(Karagül, 2012).

A 30-month study conducted at Harvard University found that people who practiced religious worship were healthier and responded faster to treatment processes. Spiritual support positively affects stress hormones, blood pressure, heart rate and breathing(Karagül, 2012). One of the main characteristics of health services is that services offered in other fields cannot substitute health services. This is because health services are unique and cannot be replaced by any other service provided in the field. The form and content of the service are determined by health personnel; therefore, service recipients do not have the right to discuss with

providers(Aktan & Işıık, 2007). The perception of illness varies from person to person and this perception may differ according to the environmental, psychological and socio-economic factors experienced by the individual. In the case of physical illnesses, cognitive distortions such as disaster perception, overgeneralization and personalization are common. These distortions may increase anxiety and lead to emotional disorders such as anger and depression(Özkan & Kanser, 2007).

It is of great importance that the person providing spiritual care services treats the patient from a holistic perspective. An appropriate service model should be determined by considering the patient's hospitalization and treatment process. This process should be based on the patient's psycho-social structure, socio-economic status and demographic characteristics. A model should be developed in line with the needs and a targeted process should be followed. The spiritual care worker should be in contact not only with the patient, but also with the patient's relatives and involve them in the care process(Esendir, 2016).

Spiritual care is a professional service to help patients discover and strengthen their spirituality and to help them cope with illness by encouraging them in this process. This care provides people with values such as patience, gratitude and trustworthiness and provides important support in the process of coping with illness. In a study, the awareness levels of healthcare professionals on spiritual care were emphasized. In the study, it was found that the perception levels of spiritual care of doctors, midwives and nurses were close to each other, and the level of education did not affect this perception. No significant differences were observed in the demographic characteristics of the participants. Approximately one third of the healthcare professionals participating in the study learned about the concept of spiritual care during training. The question about who should provide spiritual care was mostly answered by religious officials(Esendir, 2016).

Consulting a healthcare professional on spiritual care is an important initiative. Steps must be taken to raise awareness of spiritual care, which should be supported through both professional education and other governmental resources. To enhance public awareness, medical professionals need to express their views on spiritual care and participate in related discussions. A study on children's spiritual care highlighted that Japanese research lacked examples of spiritual care practices for children(Bal Koçak, 2015). This significant study, examining the applicability of hospital spiritual care services for children, emphasizes the need to address children's spiritual needs. It also underscores that spiritual care professionals

should possess not only general knowledge of spiritual care services but also psychological and educational training. This study focuses on spiritual care models implemented in different countries and highlights their applicability in our country (Bal Koçak, 2015).

For example, another important study of the Hıscare Chaplaincy, one of the various applications of spiritual care services, reveals some of the principles of this applied model. Within the scope of spiritual care services applied in hospitals, providing necessary information about the patient to spiritual care professionals and providing necessary information to spiritual care professionals according to the sociocultural structure of the hospital are among the relevant principles. Other principles include knowing that the patient's family is a part of the process, recording conversations with the patient, and respecting the concept of time when providing spiritual services (Mollaođlu, 2013). These spiritual care principles are also considered a source of inspiration for other spiritual care services.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual care in healthcare services plays a critical role in meeting the spiritual, psychological and emotional needs of patients, as well as contributing to their physical healing processes. This study revealed that patients' needs for spiritual support are becoming increasingly important and concluded that healthcare providers should recognize and meet these needs. Spiritual care is an indispensable support mechanism, especially for long-term illnesses, terminally ill patients and individuals experiencing traumatic experiences.

Patients' need for spiritual support is not limited to their religious beliefs and spiritual aspects, but also serves to improve their quality of life and reduce negative emotional states such as hopelessness and depression. In this context, accepting spiritual care services as an integral part of professional health care will be an important factor in improving the general health status of patients.

The fact that spiritual care practices are becoming more common in health institutions shows that health professionals should receive more training on spiritual care and practices in this field should be strengthened. However, it should not be forgotten that spiritual care requires a multidisciplinary approach and the individual needs of each patient must be taken into account. As a result, strengthening spiritual care in health services will be an important step in improving both the physical and spiritual well-being of patients.

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