

Abstract

‘ATTITUDES OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS CONCERNING THE SPIRITUALITY OF PATIENTS SUFFERING FROM DEMENTIA’

This descriptive research study was used to obtain information about ‘The Attitudes of Health Care Professionals and their concern of spirituality in persons suffering from dementia.’ The study also explored the health care professionals’ perception of spiritual care and what the terms ‘Spirituality and spiritual care’ meant to them.

The researcher used descriptive non-experimental design where qualitative and quantitative data were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire. The sample was a convenience one of sixty health care professionals from the local mental health institution and the state home for the elderly, with a response rate of 90%.

This study gave further indication that spirituality and spiritual care are still greatly associated with religiosity. This assumption is recurrent in previous studies carried out in predominant Judeo-Christian societies (Narayansamy 1993, Ross 1997, Baldacchino 2003, Baldacchino 2006). The findings in this study indicate that the nursing sample showed more awareness about spiritual care, other health care professionals in the study, namely medical officers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists showed a lack of knowledge of the subject. The majority of health care professionals appear to have a positive attitude towards the delivery of spiritual care in patients suffering from dementia as they are willing to participate in this care and felt that spirituality should be included in their course education.

Finally whilst acknowledging the limitations of the study, such as the use of a convenience sample and the lack of more qualitative data, the findings of this study tentatively suggest the need to incorporate educational sessions in course curriculum on spiritual care.

This is particularly relevant for professions other than nursing who in some cases had received no preparation whatsoever on the subject of the spiritual needs of these elderly mentally ill patients. Further research is suggested to answer the research question generated by this study.