



VIRTUAL GRAND ROUNDS

What patients can teach us about Religion and Spirituality today

Presented by:

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Religion and spirituality in the U.S. have been shifting markedly, and physicians are treating patients of increasingly varying beliefs, about which doctors may have little understanding, posing critical challenges for medical education and practice. Despite some efforts to improve medical education on religion and spirituality, most doctors feel that their training in these areas is inadequate. This talk draws on conversations with providers and patients over several years in various clinical and research contexts, in which religious/spiritual issues have arisen, and suggests how patients and their families commonly utter to providers religious/spiritual comments or questions unexpectedly, directly or indirectly. Patients and their families may make a total of at least nine different types of comments, within four large domains: perceiving roles of God in disease and, making medical decisions, interacting with providers, and pondering after life. Doctors face certain challenges, and often respond in one of four ways: by making no comment, responding by asking strictly medical questions, commenting on the patient's remark, or referring the patient to a chaplain. Medical education should thus encourage trainees to recognize the potential significance of these statements and be prepared to respond, even if briefly, developing responses to each of these types of statements as they see fit. Awareness of potential differences between key aspects of other (e.g., non-Western) faiths may also help (e.g., through case vignettes). Further research should examine more fully how patients broach these realms, how physicians respond, and how often medical curricula mention non-Western traditions.

Education Objectives:

1. Review ways in which patients raise religious, spiritual and existential issues with healthcare providers
2. Illustrate how healthcare providers often respond to these statements
3. Discuss how healthcare education, research and practices can address these issues more effectively

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This program is pending approval from National Association of Social Workers, CT.

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