

**FAST FACTS AND CONCEPTS #19**  
**TAKING A SPIRITUAL HISTORY 3<sup>RD</sup>****Bruce Ambuel PhD**

**Background** Illness raises fundamental questions – *For what may I hope? Why do I suffer? Does my suffering have meaning? What happens after I die?* When a physician stands with a patient as they face death, the physician inevitably plays a role in supporting the patient's inquiry into these spiritual questions (see *Fast Fact #31 Confronting Personal Mortality*). In addition some patients have specific preferences regarding medical care, death and dying that are based upon their religious beliefs. The physician often plays an important role in supporting a patient's exploration of these issues. Taking a spiritual history is one way to support the patient in this exploration. Maugans (1997) presents a framework for taking a spiritual history; the interview below comes primarily from Maugans' article with some modification based upon the other sources cited. See *Fast Fact #274* for information on the FICA Spirituality History Tool.

**Taking a Spiritual History****S—Spiritual belief system**

- *Do you have a formal religious affiliation? Can you describe this?*
- *Do you have a spiritual life that is important to you?*
- *What is your clearest sense of the meaning of your life at this time?*

**P—Personal spirituality**

- *Describe the beliefs and practices of your religion that you personally accept.*
- *Describe those beliefs and practices that you do not accept or follow.*
- *In what ways is your spirituality/religion meaningful for you?*
- *How is your spirituality/religion important to you in daily life?*

**I—Integration with a spiritual community**

- *Do you belong to any religious or spiritual groups or communities?*
- *How do you participate in this group/community? What is your role?*
- *What importance does this group have for you?*
- *In what ways is this group a source of support for you?*
- *What types of support and help does or could this group provide for you in dealing with health issues?*

**R—Ritualized practices and restrictions**

- *What specific practices do you carry out as part of your religious and spiritual life (e.g. prayer, meditation, services, etc.)*
- *What lifestyle activities or practices do your religion encourage, discourage or forbid?*
- *What meaning do these practices and restrictions have for you? To what extent have you followed these guidelines?*

**I—Implications for medical care**

- *Are there specific elements of medical care that your religion discourages or forbids? To what extent have you followed these guidelines?*
- *What aspects of your religion/spirituality would you like to keep in mind as I care for you?*
- *What knowledge or understanding would strengthen our relationship as physician and patient?*
- *Are there barriers to our relationship based upon religious or spiritual issues?*
- *Would you like to discuss religious or spiritual implications of health care?*

**T—Terminal events planning**

- *Are there particular aspects of medical care that you wish to forgo or have withheld because of your religion/spirituality?*

- *Are there religious or spiritual practices or rituals that you would like to have available in the hospital or at home?*
- *Are there religious or spiritual practices that you wish to plan for at the time of death, or following death?*
- *From what sources do you draw strength in order to cope with this illness?*
- *For what in your life do you still feel gratitude even though ill?*
- *When you are afraid or in pain, how do you find comfort?*
- *As we plan for your medical care near the end of life, in what ways will your religion and spirituality influence your decisions?*

**References:**

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3. Griffith JL, Griffith ME. Hope in suffering/pain in health: Talking with patients about spiritual issues. Presented at The 18<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Behavioral Sciences in Family Medicine, Chicago, Illinois, October 1997.

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