

# **SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO DEMENTIA**

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Spirituality is an umbrella term that looks for meaning of one's life and exploring the inner self. It is therefore spirituality that differentiates human from other animal species. There are several important vehicles for practicing spirituality like religiosity, meditation, yoga, music, vegetarianism, fasting and positive selfless conduct and human relationships, contemplation and other methods of concentration. Many additional factors like strong devotion to work and recreational activity and worship to relatively non-God deities like Goddess of enthusiasm (Uma) can also be encompassed under spirituality.

Several spiritual practices have been claimed to impart physical and mental health benefits (1-3). This raises the possibility of existence of spiritual needs in patients suffering from many disorders including dementia and the necessity of incorporating spiritual services in the health care programs for such disorders. Research work done on dementia and spirituality continues to be a grey area due to our poor understanding of the complex concept of spirituality as well as our doubt about the ability of dementia patients to comprehend and practice spirituality. How is spirituality affected by dementia and the carers, how can spirituality modify or benefit dementia patients and their carers and how do religious communities view dementia patients in the society are some of the moot questions. Jolley et al (4) found no reduction of spiritual awareness in early stages of dementia and this is similar to what exists in their carers. Katsuno (5) and Snyder (6) found religiosity had positive effect on QOL and coping ability in early dementia. Goodell (7) made similar observations for those with more advanced disease.

Practice of music, incense touch, visual symbols all of which do not require cognitive pathways are particularly important methods of spiritual therapy for dementia.

## **Meditation**

An ordinary person considers meditation or contemplation only as a religious action like worship or prayer. But meditation strengthens the mind, and makes it one pointed.

For instance, any number of positive thoughts like love, compassion, contentment, optimism, enthusiasm, composure, forgiveness, harmony, honesty, freedom, friendship could be the vehicles for practicing spirituality and giving a sense of feeling high and great. Developing such perquisites is the work of a life time and earlier done, better it is.

## **Music**

Music has also a positive impact on health especially mental health in the elderly. Music works as a stress buster and as a soothing balm. In western countries, music therapists are known to work in psychiatric hospitals,

Music therapy can meet following needs of Alzheimer's Disease patients.

1. Facilitates reminiscences and evoke memories of significant events and people.

- 2.Motivates the patient for independence and communication.
- 3.Gives feeling of dignity and self worth.
- 4.Provides an outlet of self-expression.
- 5.Stimulates memory.
- 6.Decreases aggressive behavior in older patients of dementia.

### **Conclusion**

It is recommended that religious services should be so designed as multisensory experiences which emphasize non cognitive pathways (e.g. visual symbols, touch, incense and music) over cognitive pathways (e.g. sermons, reading etc.). Emphasis has also emerged on spirituality for care givers and family members who are looking after dementia patients. It has been shown that care givers who have spiritual beliefs and practice them are less likely to be negatively affected by the burden of care giving than those who do not carry such beliefs.

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