	North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) **PO Box 121; Botsford, CT 06404 *** Phone/Fax (tollfree): 888.426.4712** **Email: info@nacsw.org *** Website: http://www.nacsw.org** **"*A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work*"**

INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION AND BELIEF INTO CLINICAL RESEARCH

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Expanding the Research Base:

Integrating Spirituality, Religion and Belief into Clinical Research

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Background

- The Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations makes specific references to religion/spirituality that safeguards each patient's personal dignity

Background

- JCAHO safeguards that each patient's cultural, psychosocial, spiritual and personal values, beliefs, and preferences are respected

Background

- More than 50 studies have affirmed health benefits of spirituality and religion

- Fewer physical, mental, and social problems among believers

Background

- Being a member of a religious community can increase levels of social support

Background

- Religious precepts provide a structure that promotes healthy behaviors

Background

- Religion gives the believer a sense of order and meaning

- Religious practice promotes compliance with treatment to enhance recovery

Background

- Religious practice promotes acceptance and adjustment to the challenges of physical and mental illness

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Learning Objectives

- Identify one personal goal for an action you can take in your practice or research that supports dialogue on religion, spirituality or belief

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Promoting dialogue

- To recognize the role of spirituality, religion and/or belief in the patient's life

Promoting dialogue

- In supervision, discuss how your religion, spirituality or beliefs help you in your professional life

Promoting Dialogue

- Recognize the taboo of discussing faith and belief in public

- Recognize that personal disclosure poses potential risks and consequences

Promoting dialogue

- To work in partnership to support common goals that bridge different belief systems

Introducing New Values

- To introduce the value of religion, spirituality or belief as important life domain areas in patients' lives

Promoting dialogue

- To share publications with peers and colleagues that affirm the role of religion and spirituality

Learning Objective

- What principles and values promote dialogue and openness to support the value of religion, spirituality and belief in our organizational culture?

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Identify Core Values

- What values unite us?
- Respect for persons
- Affirming the positive
- Recognizing individual strengths

Build Upon Core Values

- What goals do we share?
- Using natural supports
- Meeting patients where they are
- Providing culturally competent services

Learning Objectives

- Determine and identify 3 ways that religion and spirituality present unique challenges and opportunities in research

Challenges

- Bias: Science and religion are separate and do not converge
- Belief is abstract and subjective
- Metaphysical events are not observable

Challenges

- Research is hypothesis driven

- Observations are based on objective data

- Methods are standardized

- Results can be replicated

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Is it research?

- Research is defined as a *systematic investigation* that includes development, testing, and evaluation. Research is designed to develop or contribute to knowledge that can be generalized to the population.

A Systematic Investigation

- Objective
- Background & Significance
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusion

Observational research

- Observational research study: specific data is collected without any intervention from the person conducting the study. (retrospective)

Experimental research study

- Informed consent is required
- The research investigator designs the scope of the study, the study population and what activity will be conducted with the study participants

Experimental research

- Study procedures are carried out in accordance with standardized methods
- Study conditions are controlled

Experimental research

- Shows a cause and effect relationship between the intervention or experiment and the results or study outcome

Experimental study

- Sometimes the results are not the same as they would be if carried out in a real world setting. (prospective)

Experimental study designs

- Experimental study designs can also use

- a control population

- random assignment

- blinding

Research Design Questions

- What do we know/observe from our work?
- Individuals
- Families
- Groups
- Agency
- Community

Research Design Questions

- Is the selection of subjects equitable

- Are there adequate provisions to protect the privacy and safety of subjects

Learning Objectives

- What do we need to know in order to develop strategies to integrate religion and spirituality approaches into practice or research?

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Assessing Research Readiness

- Who are the stakeholders in the agency we need to approach before we begin a study?

- How open is the agency or community to religion and spirituality?

Assessing Research Readiness

- How much time and money will it cost to conduct the study?

- What do we know already about the individuals, or groups we would study?

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Assessing Research Readiness

- Are we approaching this study with a culturally competent perspective?
- Who will be involved?
- Who will report to whom?
- How often will we meet?

Assessing Research Readiness

- Who will be listed on the publications?

- Where will we keep research records?

Assessing Research Readiness

- Who will be responsible for maintaining records?

- Who will be responsible for quality assurance?

Assessing Research Readiness

- What do we want to learn?
- What are the validated sources of data we already have from the potential study group?
- How can we standardize our methods?

Assessing Agency Readiness

- What measures do we need to add to answer our research questions?

- What additional training is needed?

- Who will do the analysis?

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Assessing Research Readiness

- What makes this different from standard care/treatment?

- Who are the additional stakeholders/exerts we will need to work with us?

Strategies for Moving Forward

Strengths	Barriers
• Stakeholders	• Stakeholders
• Partnerships	• Structures
• Resources	• Resources
• Training	• Resistance
• Mission	• Priorities

Observational

- Case conferences
- Integrating patients' religious practices as a strength in the context of treatment
- Case studies
- Retrospective analysis

Observational Research

- Analyze, evaluate the impact of patients' beliefs/religious practices on their interaction with the agency

Cross Cultural Analysis

- Do patients perceive their therapists' values or agency policies as supportive or antagonistic to his/her religious/cultural perspective

Research Methods We Use

- Rigorous scientific methodology has been used in the development of protocol design

- Principal Investigator delegates responsibilities

Research Methods We Use

- Protocol and informed consent is developed, reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board and other regulatory entities

Research Methods

- Standardized study procedures are conducted

- Validated assessments, neuropsychological and spirituality instruments are administered by trained staff

Research Methods

- Imaging studies may be conducted

- Results are analyzed

- Findings are submitted to peer-reviewed journals

Example of a Study Design

- Prospective study

- Informed consent

- Web-based

- Comprehensive demographics

Study Design (continued)

- Self report on medical history, current medications, illnesses

- Self-administered validated spirituality measures

- Narrative description of religious experience

- Content analysis

In Conclusion

- Further analysis can assist in evaluating readiness to conduct research before embarking on a study.

- Conducting research relies on partnership and teamwork.

Conclusion

- The Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations standards safeguards each person's dignity and respects cultural, spiritual values and beliefs.

Conclusion

- Religion and spirituality can play a key role in expanding the research base to promote inclusive, culturally responsive services and systems of care.