SPRINKLING SPIRITUALITY THROUGHOUT THE ALZHEIMER’S CAREGIVER’S JOURNEY

By: Sally P. Moore

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Sprinkling Spirituality
Throughout the
Alzheimer’s Caregiver’s Journey

By

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the multidimensional role of the Alzheimer’s caregiver.

Several issues were explored, specifically:

- the unique characteristics of and demands placed on the caregiver
- coping strategies, particularly the role of spirituality
- the impact of the disease and caregiving on work and family.

Implications for practice were discussed.
“SURVIVING TODAY - AN ANCHOR FOR CAREGIVERS”

*ANTICIPATORY GRIEF WHEEL

*LIFE FUNCTION

SHOCK

*SUSPENSE

SURRENDER

SHATTERED

STRAIN

*Adapted from Donna O’Toole’s “Grief Wheel” (1982) by Sally Moore, MSW

July 2006
Caregiver’s Anticipatory Grief Wheel Notes

SHOCK

*Shield* for protection after hearing, “Your loved one has CA, AD, ALS, etc.” or, “There is nothing more I can do, have you considered Hospice?”

- *Sponge* to absorb the remainder of the physician’s message

As shock wears off, caregiver begins to remember what physician said

SUSPENSE

- *Focus*: on Loved One
- *Image*: Gray skies (from dark to fluffy white with blue sky)
- *Characteristics:*
  - Parental instinct to shield loved one from reality of diagnosis
  - Grasping for straws
  - Second/third opinions
  - Contradictions
  - Searching for any answers to make sense of what is going on

STRAIN

- *Focus*: on caregiver
- *Image*: Black or White (no in between)
- *Characteristics:*
  - Self-pity
  - Guilt
  - Resentment
  - Family and friends: either supportive or disappear

SHATTERED

- *Focus*: Hopelessness of situation/ Helpless: no way out
- *Image*: Slivers of a rainbow in dark sky
- *Characteristics*:
  - one of three scenarios
  - Death of caregiver
  - Abandonment of loved one
  - Survivor: usually one defining moment in time
SURRENDER

- **Focus:** Caregiver and Loved One
- **Image:** (Sunrise that will eventually lead to the glorious final Sunset)
- **Characteristics:**
  - Live the moment
  - Journey together
  - Strong bond ("Fall in love all over again")

When gray clouds appear, they look for a rainbow

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SOCIAL WORKER’S ROLE

- Gently guide caregiver through stages
- Validate feelings
- Normalize reality
- Listen, listen
- Plant seeds

Intellectually, the caregiver knows what is best for her loved one.

Emotionally, the caregiver may be unable to “play God” when it comes to making tough decisions.
Spirituality

“is the devotion to the immaterial part of humanity & nature rather than worldly things such as possessions” Barker, R.L. (1999) The Social Work Dictionary (4th ed.)


Spiritual Beliefs

Important in meeting daily challenges by:

- Nurturing
- Assisting
- Strengthening

Relied on to get them through the day:

- Guidance
- Support
- Comfort
Transcendence


Transcendent Properties

-Live in the moment
-Face death on a daily basis
-Personal relationship with God
-Limitless compassion
-Abiding gratitude
-When all else failed, faith remained
Approaching Spirituality

Start the conversation

Probe for feelings

Mindful of the caregiver’s spiritual beliefs

Stay in the caregiver’s NOW

Proclaim her/his struggles

Messages of strength

Say it simply

Platitudes are NO-NOs

Moments of silence
References


