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Educators' views of “Spirituality in Healthcare”

*Sharon Prentis, John Wattis, Melanie Rogers,
John Stephenson and Janice Jones .*

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The Study

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- Online survey of educators in Healthcare – conducted early 2012
- Mixed method with:
 - Likert scale with 16 items, 8 exploring general attitudes to spirituality and 8 focusing on issues in higher education
 - Freehand responses to four queries/statements:
 - Please write a short sentence that reflects your definition of spirituality
 - Please list, if any, the strategies you use to integrate spirituality into your teaching
 - What professional considerations are you aware of when incorporating the teaching of spirituality into the curriculum?
 - What general concerns do you have about teaching spirituality as an aspect of the curriculum?

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Results

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- 29 respondents from Health (roughly 29% response rate – compare RCN survey with around 1% response from 400,000!)
- Highlights of quantitative data
- Highlights of qualitative analysis
- Some conclusions about ways forward.

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Highlights from the Likert scale questions (1):

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- The internal reliability of the “general” scale was high (alpha=0.741). The internal reliability of the *Education* scale was high (alpha=0.785).
- Neither years teaching in higher education, nor gender, significantly affected scores at the 5% level but there was a tendency for females to score the educational scale slightly higher (p=0.077)
- The “general” and “educational” scales were not independent of each other
- Overall scores of 17 (range 9-28) on the “general” and 19 (range 8-40) on the “educational” scale fell short of what could be regarded as the “neutral” point (24 in each case)

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Seven items where >75% agreed or strongly agreed

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1. I believe spirituality is associated with values, ethics and morals.
3. I believe spiritual values are relevant to my subject area
4. I believe spirituality is about having a sense of hope
5. I believe Spirituality can be distinguished from religion.
9. I believe spirituality concerns the way we live here and now.
13. I believe education is about liberation and empowerment.
16. I believe spirituality concerns not only individual but larger organisational values.

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A paradox?

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- Around 90% agreed or strongly agreed that spiritual values were relevant to their subject area and
- Nearly half thought spirituality integral to teaching and learning
- Only 17% agreed it was actually integrated into their curricula.

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Qualitative root 1: Please write a short sentence that reflects your definition of spirituality

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- Importance of self, person(hood) and being
- Sense of direction, meaning and purpose
- Spirituality is practical, affecting how people live and act towards others
- The intangibility or non-physical nature of spirituality – something that could not be seen or touched but experienced in awe, wonder and comfort

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Q 2: Please list, if any, the strategies used to integrate spirituality into your teaching

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- Topographical or structural ideas about WHERE it fits: e.g. end of life care, ethics and morality
- Ideas about HOW it is taught; encouraging self-awareness, reflective learning, discussion, poetry, sharing and modelling
- Emphasis on “humanistic values” of empathy and compassion

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Q3: What professional considerations are you aware of when incorporating the teaching of spirituality into the curriculum?

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- Personal values should not be imposed on students
- Dominance of secularism and fear of causing offence – “political correctness”?
- the relevance of spirituality when considering professional codes of conduct and ethics.

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What general concerns do you have about teaching spirituality as an aspect of the curriculum?

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- Tendency for people to confuse spirituality with religion
- Number of helpful descriptions of how to approach the topic: clarity of purpose, user-friendly approaches, discussing attitudes, careful management of debate
- Obstacles: personal factors in the teachers (lack of knowledge and confidence), student factors “taboo” and defensiveness
- Intangibility of spirituality and the time-intensive reflective methods create a danger that it is squeezed out.

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Conclusions (1) Spirituality is:

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- *Associated with values, ethics and morals*
- *Relevant in healthcare education*
- *About having a sense of hope (direction, meaning)*
- *Not the same as religion*
- *Concerned with the way we live here and now*
- *Relevant to individual AND organisational values*
- *Relevant and possibly integral to healthcare education but rarely actually integrated into curricula.*

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Conclusions (2)

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This is an area where a great deal of further work is needed but it is possible to say:

- SPIRITUALITY IS CONCERNED WITH FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN VALUES
- It is not any easy area to define or teach but
- WE NEED TO BUILD ON CURRENT APPROACHES TO THIS AREA
- We need to find ways of helping educators to ensure it is adequately covered in curricula
- SPIRITUALITY IS DISTINCT FROM RELIGION
- Transcultural approaches that embrace humanistic, secular and religious ways of addressing meaning, purpose and direction in life offer a way of minimising the obstacles presented...

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