



The role of spiritual care departments in Iranian hospitals: a holistic approach to healing

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Introduction

Spiritual care includes religious rituals, practices, and activities that comfort and support seriously ill individuals as they seek meaning and a connection to something more extraordinary or transcendent (1). Integrating spiritual care into healthcare services has been acknowledged as a critical component of holistic patient care. In Iran, where Shi'a Islam and rich cultural heritage precede many aspects of life, spiritual needs often coincide with physical healing requirements (2). Establishing spiritual departments in hospitals aims to address these needs, promoting well-being through emotional, psychological, and spiritual support (3).

Significant evidence highlights the positive effects of spirituality and religion on recovery from cancer and chronic illnesses and on adaptation to health conditions (4). Currently, most spirituality interventions are based on proposed Western models. Given Iran's unique culture and religious characteristics, there is a strong need to provide spiritual care that is contextually based in Iranian hospitals (5).

Historical context

The concept of spiritual care in Iranian healthcare can be traced back to the advent of Islamic medicine, which emphasized the treatment of the whole person rather than just the physical symptoms. Historically, Persian scholars such as Avicenna (Ibn Sina) advanced the notion that mental and spiritual health is as crucial as physical health. Iran is one of the six countries with the highest scientific output regarding the relationship between spirituality, health, and well-being (6).

The delivery of spiritual care has received considerable attention in Iran in recent years. Although many scientific documents have been published on this issue, there was no spiritual care department in the Iranian healthcare system to provide these services in line with the patient's spiritual

needs, backed up by research, and based on the existing conditions and cultural and religious considerations (7).

The role of spiritual care departments

Spiritual care departments in Iranian hospitals primarily aim to:

1. Address the spiritual needs of patients, families, and healthcare providers.
2. Support during crises, such as severe illness, trauma, or end-of-life care.
3. Facilitate connections between patients and their faith communities.
4. Enhance the healthcare experience through spiritual counseling, prayer, and reflection(8).

Benefits for patients and healthcare providers

1. Patient Well-Being: Spiritual care leads to numerous positive outcomes for patients, such as recovery, mental, emotional, and physical integrity, enhancement of spiritual well-being, psychological adaptation, increased inner energy and strength, and a sense of satisfaction among patients (9). Spiritual care also has been shown to contribute positively to patients' mental health, allowing them to process their experiences and find meaning in suffering. It can serve as a complementary therapy to medical treatment (10).
2. Another benefit of spiritual care is psychological adaptation. Spiritual care enhances spiritual knowledge and coping skills, leading to more effective adaptation to life's critical circumstances (9).
3. Spiritual care also has significant positive outcomes for healthcare providers, such as enhancing nurses' spiritual awareness, providing meaning and purpose to nurses' professional lives, and increasing job satisfaction (11).

Healthcare Provider Support: Care providers often face

emotional burnout and stress. Spiritual care can serve as a support system, helping them to reconnect with their purpose and values in providing care (12).

Challenges in implementation

Despite the benefits, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of spiritual care departments:

1. **Lack of Standardization:** A standardized model for spiritual care in Iranian hospitals can lead to consistent practices and varied quality of care.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** While Iran is predominantly Muslim, the spiritual needs of patients may vary widely based on personal beliefs, necessitating culturally sensitive approaches(13).
3. **Training and Awareness:** Many healthcare providers need formal education in spiritual care, leading to uncertainty regarding effectively addressing these aspects (14).

Conclusion

The introduction of spiritual care departments in Iranian hospitals marks a pivotal evolution in the approach to healthcare, emphasizing the importance of a holistic perspective. While challenges remain in implementation, the potential benefits to patients and healthcare providers present a compelling case for developing these departments further. Future efforts must focus on establishing standardized practices, enhancing training programs, and fostering collaboration between healthcare and spiritual care providers.

Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization: Hamidreza Sadeghi-Gandomani.

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Competing Interests

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