

Spiritual Practices

These span a wide range, from the religious to secular, which may not be obviously spiritual. You may:

- belong to a faith tradition and take part in services or other activities with other people
- take part in rituals, symbolic practices and other forms of worship
- go on pilgrimage and retreats
- spend time enjoying nature
- give of yourself in acts of compassion
- spend time in meditation, reflection or prayer, reading scripture
- listen to, singing and/or playing sacred music
- be creative: painting, sculpture, cookery, gardening etc.
- make and keep good relationships
- join in team sports or other activities that involve cooperation and trust.

Spiritual Values and Skills

Spiritual practices can help us to develop the better parts of ourselves. They can help us to become more creative, patient, persistent, honest, kind, compassionate, wise, calm, hopeful and joyful. These are all part of the best health care.

Spiritual skills include:

- being honest and able to see ourselves as others see us
- being able to stay focused in the present, to be alert, unhurried and attentive
- being able to rest, relax and create a still, peaceful state of mind
- developing a deeper sense of empathy for others
- being able to be with someone who is suffering, while still being hopeful

- learning better judgement, for example about when to speak or act, and when to remain silent or do nothing
- learning how to give without feeling drained
- being able to grieve and let go.

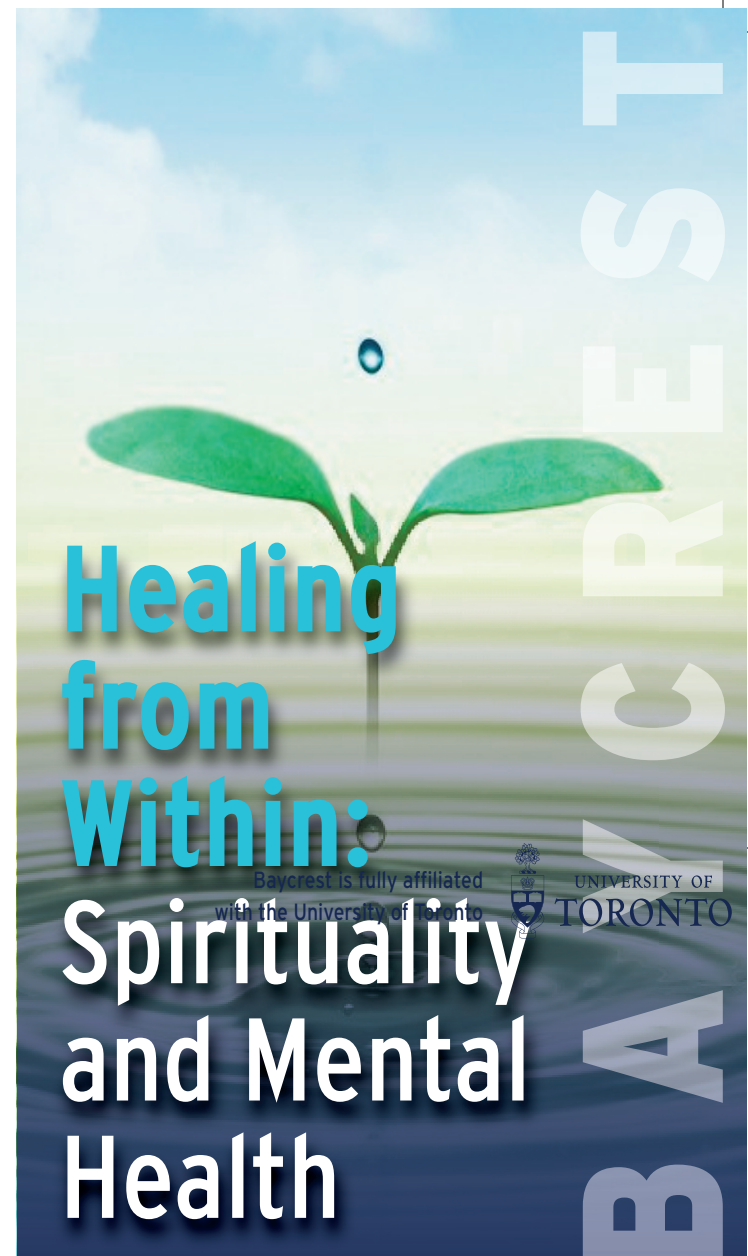
Spirituality emphasises our connections to other people and the world, which creates the idea of 'reciprocity'. This means that the giver and receiver both get something from what happens; that if we help another person, we help ourselves.

The Place of Chaplaincy

Chaplains are increasingly part of the teams that provide care both in and outside hospital. Baycrest's Department of Spiritual Care

- has access to a sacred spaces
- interacts with local clergy and faith communities
- is aware that, sometimes, an individual's engagement with religious beliefs and activities can be unhelpful and even damaging
- works closely with the mental health team so that spiritual needs can be recognized and helped

Evidence shows that people who belong to a faith community or who hold religious or spiritual beliefs have better mental health.



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Adapted from "Spirituality and Mental Health" and used by permission from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

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Connecting Spirituality and Mental Health

Providers, patients and caregivers are increasingly aware of ways in which aspects of spirituality can offer real benefits for mental health. We don't need to hold a formal religious belief to take part in religious practices or belong to an established faith tradition to experience spirituality.

What is Spirituality?

There is no one definition, but in general, spirituality is something everyone can experience and it helps us find meaning and purpose in the things we value. Spirituality can bring hope in times of suffering and loss and encourage us to seek the best relationship with ourselves, others and what lies beyond.

Spirituality views life as a journey, where good and bad experiences can help us to learn, develop and mature. It emphasizes the healing of the person, not just the disease and often becomes more important in times of distress, physical and mental illness, loss, bereavement and the approach of death.

How is Spirituality Different from Religion?

Spirituality is not tied to any particular religious belief or tradition. Religious traditions certainly include individual spirituality, but each religion has its own distinct community-based worship, beliefs, sacred texts and traditions. Although culture and beliefs can play a part in spirituality, every person has his/her own unique experience of spirituality. Spirituality also highlights how connected we are to the world and other people.



What is Spiritual Health Care?

Spiritual health care responds to patients yearnings as part of their care plan. People with mental health problems say they want:

- meaningful activity such as creative art, engaging work or enjoying nature
- to feel safe and secure
- to be treated with dignity and respect
- to feel belonging, valued and trusted
- the chance to make sense of their lives
- permission/support to develop their relationship with God or the Absolute.

Someone with a religious belief may need:

- a time, a place and privacy in which to pray

- the chance to explore spiritual concerns
- to be reassured that the psychiatrist will not try to undermine his/her faith
- encouragement to deepen his/her faith
- to feel universally connected
- and, sometimes, to experience forgiveness.

What Difference Can Spirituality Make?

Those who engage in spiritual practices report better self-control, self-esteem and confidence. They experience faster and easier recovery (often through healthy grieving of losses and through recognizing their strengths), better relationships - with self, others and with God/creation/nature. They report feeling a new sense of meaning, hope and peace of mind, which allows them to accept and live with continuing problems.

Religious/Spiritual Assessment

Sometimes, a professional may want to use a questionnaire to find out things like:

- What helpful knowledge or strengths do you have that can be encouraged?
- What support can your faith community offer?
- What is your life all about? Is there anything that gives you a sense of meaning or purpose?
- What are your main fears about the future?
- Do you feel the need for forgiveness?
- What, if anything, gives you hope?
- What kind of support would help you?

Spiritual assessments should be part of every mental health assessment.