

# Exploration of OT Practitioner Perceptions of Spirituality and Spiritual Care in Hospice and Palliative Care Settings

Allison Naber, OTD, OTR/L, CLT-LANA<sup>1</sup>, Charlie Webb, OTD OTR/L<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD, USA; <sup>2</sup>Ensign, Phoenix, Arizona, United States

DOI: 10.5014/ajot.2022.76S1-PO36

Date presented: March 31, 2022

Primary Author and Speaker: Allison Naber, Allison.Naber@usd.edu

**PURPOSE:** As holistic practitioners, occupational therapists are charged with addressing a client's unique mind, body, and spirit needs, yet many cite a lack of adequate skills or formal education as barriers to addressing spirituality (Morris et al., 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore practitioners' perceptions of spirituality, the relationship between these perceptions and years of practice or average hours per week working in hospice and palliative care settings where spirituality is commonly addressed, and methods for evaluating and promoting client spirituality. The outcomes of this study may uncover opportunities for increasing one's confidence in addressing spirituality in practice.

**DESIGN:** This descriptive exploratory study investigated perceptions of spirituality among occupational therapy practitioners working in hospice and palliative care. Inclusion criteria required that participants were occupational therapy practitioners working full or part-time in hospice and palliative care who could read and write in English. Participants completed an anonymous online survey made accessible via postings on various OT, hospice, and palliative care online forums. An email was also sent to multiple hospice and palliative care organizations.

**METHOD:** A survey tool was used to collect responses to demographic characteristics, the Spirituality and Spiritual Care Rating Scale-Revised (SSCRS-Revised) (McSherry et al., 2002), the Spirituality Attitude and Involvement List (de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2012). The survey also included open-ended questions on formal spiritual care training, assessments and interventions used to address spirituality, and the link between meaningful occupations and spirituality promotion. Descriptive statistics and Spearman rho correlation analysis was conducted on the ordinal and non-parametric data.

**RESULTS:** Study participants included ten female occupational therapy practitioners who self-identified as working in hospice or palliative care settings, and ranged from 29-58 years of age ( $M = 42.6$ ,  $SD = 10.8$ ). Participants reported working in hospice or palliative care settings between 0-30 hours per week ( $M = 10$ ,  $SD = 12.4$ ) for 1 to 36 years ( $M = 6.9$ ,  $SD = 10.4$ ). Spearman rho correlation analysis was utilized to compare assessment scores to years of practice and average hours per week working in hospice and palliative care. The relationship between the spirituality factor of the SSCRs-Revised and years of practice in hospice and palliative care ( $r_s = .88$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the relationship between the spiritual care factor of the SSCRs-Revised and average hours per week working in hospice and palliative care ( $r_s = .71$ ,  $p = .022$ ) were significantly positive. Responses to open-ended questions revealed various degrees of spiritual care training, the use of informal interviews rather than formal spirituality-based assessment tools, and a variety of occupation-based, spirituality-promoting interventions.

**CONCLUSION:** Despite the small sample size, it appears that positive perceptions of spiritual care increase with exposure to this area of practice, supporting the research hypothesis and highlighting the need for educational opportunities to increase practitioners' confidence in this aspect of care. Practitioners working in hospice and palliative care can assist in developing occupational therapy's unique approach for providing spirituality-based assessments and interventions by developing best practice guidelines for broadly integrating spirituality into practice.

**IMPACT STATEMENT:** This proposal is important to education and practice as study outcomes inform future educational tools or experiences aimed at developing student and practitioner confidence in addressing spirituality in practice.

## References

- Morris, D., Stecher, J., Briggs-Peppler, K. M., Chittenden, Ch., Rubira, J., & Wismer, L. (2014). Spirituality in occupational therapy: Do we practice what we teach? *Journal of Religion and Health*, 53(1), 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-012-9584-y>
- de Jager Meezenbroek, E., Garssen, B., van den Berg, M., Tuytel, G., Van Dierendonck, D. Visser, A., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2012). Measuring spirituality as a universal human experience: Development of the Spirituality Attitude and Involvement List (SAIL). *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, 30(2), 146-167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07347332.2011.651258>
- McSherry, W., Draper, P., & Kendrick, D. (2002). The construct validity of a rating scale designed to assess spirituality and spiritual care. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 39(7), 723-734. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7489\(02\)00014-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7489(02)00014-7)