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Examining the role of spirituality in addiction therapy: Guidelines for ethical practice

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Spirituality has long played an influential role in the treatment of addictions. Even as improving technology has expanded the treatment options for addiction professionals, the incorporation of spiritual practices remains a mainstay in clinical practice. Beyond the therapeutic relationships between patients and individual professionals, addiction treatment often occurs in sectarian agency settings where spiritual symbols, beliefs, and practices shape the treatment milieu. Whereas an abundance of research literature examines the role of spirituality as the primary or confounding variable in the assessment of treatment outcomes, the ethical and unethical use of spirituality in addiction therapy is almost nonexistent. As a result, addiction programs are left to infuse spirituality as they see fit, with little evidence-based guidance to ensure best practices. The findings from a study that examined the fine line between the innovative use of spirituality in addiction therapy and the unethical coercion of unwanted religious persuasion will be discussed during this presentation. Additionally, the presentation will provide practical guidelines for the ethical incorporation of spirituality in addiction treatment programs.

Biography

Michael E Sherr, PhD, LCSW, is Professor and Department Head of Social Work at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga. He serves as a Commissioner for the Commission on Education Policy for the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). He is also the Editor of the *Journal of Adolescent and Family Health*, Co-editor of the CSWE Religion and Spirituality Clearinghouse, and Associate Editor of the *Journal of Social Work and Christianity*. He is an internationally recognized scholar with more than fifty publications, including three books, on several areas of research and scholarship. In 2010, the University of Hong Kong awarded him the International Young Scholars Award for his research.

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