

## The Spiritual Advocate in Palliative Care

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### To the editor,

In palliative care, a transcultural healthcare approach is essential as it is directed towards particularly vulnerable patients in a pluralistic and secular society, where patients and healthcare professionals meet usually as moral strangers. Indeed, culture is a fundamental part of one's being, which reflects an ideal system of shared ideas, values, concepts, rules and meaning of life, guiding one's values, beliefs and behaviours. It impacts how a person interprets illness, suffer and death, since a person's belief system, values, rituals and outwards expressions can impact care, either positively or negatively [1]. Spirituality is a fundamental dimension of quality of life and culture care, and spiritual well-being is an essential component on palliative and end of life care. However, spirituality is often not clearly differentiated from religion, and therefore there is not a scientific and professional approach to spiritual care. Usually in a palliative care team, there is an institutionally based chaplain or a spiritual care worker to address spiritual/religious issues, which rely on religious support and techniques.

Spirituality may be defined as a journey of self-discovery and a search of the sacred, which is what gives a person a sense of meaning and purpose of life [2]. In palliative care, it is not uncommon to experience spiritual distress, defined as the disruption of one's beliefs of value system, and unaddressed spiritual issues may frustrate one's attempts to treat other symptoms and have an adverse effect on quality of life [3].

Therefore, for a holistic, comprehensive and patient-centred approach, we suggest the creation of a spiritual advocate, a healthcare professional who assesses the spiritual needs of individuals from a trans and multi-disciplinary perspective. By neutrally identifying the person's values and belief system, spiritual history, distress and needs, the person's dignity, right for self-determination and autonomy are more thoroughly respected [4]. Thus, providing the appropriate care of a dying person by allowing each individual to react to his or her beliefs in a unique way. So, the spiritual advocate must address each case individually, always taking into account the specific cultural and ethical background of the individual, towards the patient's advocacy movement. The spiritual advocate is a new professional specialty, prepared to deal with the spiritual life of any patient whichever his or her cultural and moral background in a non-directive setting.

### References

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