How Does Spiritual Care Nursing Differ from Faith Community Nursing?

Westberg Institute for Nursing | Spiritual Care Association

Spiritual Care Nursing and Faith Community Nursing are distinct but complementary nursing specialties rooted in Dr. Granger Westberg's vision of wholistic health. Both recognize the interconnected physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of the person. However, **the setting in which nursing care is delivered shapes the approach to spiritual care.**

Faith Community Nursing is practiced primarily within **faith communities**, where nurses integrate professional nursing practice with the beliefs, values, traditions, and spiritual life of the community.

Spiritual Care Nursing is designed primarily for **clinical healthcare environments**, including hospitals, outpatient clinics, long-term care, rehabilitation, hospice, and palliative care. These settings serve individuals representing diverse religious traditions, spiritual beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and nonreligious worldviews. Consequently, Spiritual Care Nursing emphasizes **pluralism, humanism, phenomenology, and an ethics of care** as philosophical foundations for spiritual nursing practice.

These foundations guide nurses to:

- **Pluralism:** Recognize, respect, and respond to diverse religious, spiritual, and nonreligious worldviews without imposing personal beliefs.
- **Humanism:** Affirm the inherent dignity, worth, and individuality of every person.
- **Phenomenology:** Seek to understand each patient's lived experience of illness, suffering, hope, meaning, and spirituality from the patient's perspective.
- **Ethics of Care:** Provide compassionate, relational, patient-centered care that respects autonomy, vulnerability, and individual preferences.

Within clinical environments, Spiritual Care Nurses apply these principles through nursing spiritual assessment, individualized care planning, evidence-based spiritual nursing interventions, and interdisciplinary collaboration, including partnership with professional chaplains.

> The distinction is not that Faith Community Nursing serves religious individuals while Spiritual Care Nursing serves diverse populations. Both specialties respect individual differences. Rather, Faith Community Nursing is situated within the context of a faith community, while Spiritual Care Nursing is designed for pluralistic clinical healthcare environments where spiritual care must be responsive to each patient's individual beliefs, values, and preferences.

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