

COVID-19 Pandemic and the Necessity of Spiritual Care

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Dear Editor,

CCOVID-19 is undoubtedly among the main crises encountered by the health care system within the last century (1). Nevertheless, the disease with all its challenges for the health care providers and treatment centers has generated invaluable opportunities as well. A major opportunity was an understanding of the necessity and importance of spiritual health and spiritual care in epidemics and critical situations. The concept of spiritual health has long been identified and accepted as a determining dimension of holistic care. However, its scope has remained limited to chronic diseases, elderly care, palliative care, and end-of-life care, being mostly neglected or underestimated in other areas of health and wellness (2).

With a dualistic lens, a human being possesses both a body and spirit (3); thus, transcendence and connectedness to a superior power are among the everlasting needs and an undeniable part of human creation. This true, innate, and implicit need becomes more and more apparent in such circumstances as the feeling to be near to death or being exposed to fear, pain, and loneliness can lead to an urgent spiritual need to be fulfilled (4). With the COVID-19 pandemic, all the instances of fear, pain, loneliness, and nearness to death were encountered by not only the patients but all those at risk and nearly everybody perceive its hazards and undesirable consequences .

In this exceptional situation, the patients feel the need for spiritual care not through a lengthy and erosive period of illness, but within a short time after being infected. On the other hand, despite the chronic diseases, health care providers are in risk of being infected and accordingly in need of spiritual support. The unknown nature of this virus, lack of vaccine, medication, or an agreed upon treatment protocol have made the process of

crisis management more difficult and the emotional, social, and economic consequences of the disease have brought about more complex situations and more vulnerable people. These accompanied by insufficient experience, especially with regards to the indigenous sociocultural components to be taken into account in macro and micro decisions, was another factor that led to more complex issues and increased pressure on individuals.

It seems that a way (if not the only way) to counteract such effects of coronavirus is to deepen and strengthen religious faith. Developing a stronger relationship with God the Almighty leads to eliminated or less distress, anxiety, and stress and increases hope and calmness, which in turn improves immunity against the disease (5). Thus, taking an advantage of spirituality against the uncertainties imposed by pandemics could be considered as a way of health promotion and disease prevention across communities. The target population for spiritual care is broad and covers not only patients but also different groups, including patients' families, health care providers and their families, families of the victims, and the public, particularly the vulnerable and those affected by the pandemics in terms of occupation, relationships, and lifestyle. Research centers and educational institutes, theological seminaries, and university departments should provide resources, guidelines, and protocols with a holistic and interdisciplinary approach and train health care providers with the competencies required for this type of care. Holistic approach in medical/ health centers can help consolidate and apply the research findings in practical circumstances .

To maximize and effectively use the capacity of spiritual care in the interest of holistic care and considering the spiritual aspect of human health, planning and designing suitable mechanisms, structures, and systems is required.

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Addressing these mostly neglected needs can be an effective step in assuring excellence and taking on a pioneer role in whole person care.

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