



Well-being

Spirituality

Case Studies

There are two cases in this “Spirituality” module. Each case is written in a context relevant to this module. The first case, “Mrs. Gregory” is a common case that also can be found in modules for other topics. The common cases are illustrated with video and audio clips. Sample discussions for each case are included. They can be used as a discussion start point and explanation for you to use in class with students.

Case 1: Mrs. Gregory, 62-year-old

Mrs. Gregory is a 62-year-old woman who has been a patient for many years at the office where you work as an office nurse. For the past few months, she has complained of increasingly severe upper abdominal pain and weight loss. An ultrasound ordered by Dr. Minor revealed a mass suspicious of liver cancer.

Mrs. Gregory and Gloria, the youngest of her three daughters, come to Dr. Minor’s office to discuss the test results. Dr. Minor discussed the test results, but you were with another patient. You know the family well and expect Mrs. Gregory to understand what Dr. Minor told her, and you plan to instruct her on use of the pain prescription Dr. Minor wrote for her. However, while clarifying her understanding about her illness, Mrs. Gregory becomes resistant. She tells you that there’s nothing wrong with her. She says, “All I need is some herbal remedies to help ease my indigestion.” She leaves after agreeing to try the pain pills suggested by Dr. Minor.

Clearly upset with her mother’s behavior and attitude in facing a terminal illness, Gloria, seeks your advice. She wants her mom to confront her disease and the fact she’s dying. However, her two sisters strongly disagree, and tell Gloria they will never speak to her again if she continues to force their mother into confronting her prognosis.

You have been working with Mrs. Gregory and learn that part of the problem for the sisters is that their father experienced a painful death in the hospital. At the time their mother said she’d never want to know that she had that to look forward to. Gloria feels strongly that her mother needs to have time to get her affairs in order. As you speak more with Gloria you discover the one saving grace (so to speak) of the whole episode with her father’s death was the presence of the Protestant chaplain. While not the same religion as her father, the chaplain

brought comfort to him and to their mother. With this new information you decide to:

1. Make a referral for a chaplain
2. Find out the name of the chaplain from Gloria and try to locate him if that is agreeable to Gloria and her mother
3. Assess the role of formal religion and spirituality in the lives of this family

Discussion

Making a referral to a chaplain misses the point of the personal relationship that was established. Therefore, both locating the Protestant chaplain with the agreement of Gloria and her mother and delving more deeply into the role of spirituality and religion in the lives of this family is very appropriate. The chaplain may be able to open the patient and her family to meaningful discussion about Mrs. Gregory's situation. And even if this discussion doesn't result, the chaplain may provide comfort to Mrs. Gregory and her daughters.

Case 2: Ms. Galea, a sixteen-year-old

Dr. James is a doctorally prepared advance practice nurse. She has been caring for Dorothy Galea, a sixteen-year-old with recurrent leukemia. While admitted to the pediatric floor, Dorothy would go over to the hospice whenever movies or other entertainment occurred. She had decided she wanted to spend her final days in the hospice to spare her younger brothers and sisters the memory of her dying at home. Prior to her discharge, Dorothy arranged with Dr. James to give her parents a tour of the hospice. At the conclusion of the tour, Mrs. Galea said to Dr. James, "Of course, like us you are Catholic." Dr. James replied that she was not.

Prior to any further discussion, the elevator door opened and Dorothy and her parents left. Dr. James had the impression that Mrs. Galea was offended that her own religion was not Catholicism.

- How might Dr. James handle this situation?
- Is Dr. James' religion important in this instance?
- To whom is it important?
- Should Dr. James follow up on this discussion?
- If so, should the discussion entail religion and spirituality?

In addition, a series of questions were raised that now can form the basis of a discussion. These questions are:

- How might Dr. James have handled Mrs. Galea's question as to whether she is a practicing Catholic?
- Is Dr. James' religion important in this instance?
- To whom?
- Should Dr. James follow-up on this discussion?
- If so, should the discussion entail religion and spirituality?

Discussion

1. Dr. James might have queried, "Why do you ask?" Depending on the response, Dr. James has several options. If Mrs. Galea says, "It's important to us that you share our religion!" Dr. James might say, "I share your hope for Dorothy's safe keeping and will do all I can for her while she's here in the Hospice." If Mrs. Galea persists, Dr. James might relate the philosophy of the Hospice to provide care without regard to religious and other distinctions. Ultimately, Dr. James might reiterate her commitment to care for Dorothy and her family. Lastly Dr. James would express her willingness to help the family find a caregiver who was Catholic.
2. Obviously it seems that Dr. James' religion is important. However, the further investigation might reveal that the family would like Catholic chaplains in attendance. The "Why do you ask?" question is key to further decision-making.
3. Dr. James' religion appears important to the Galeas. Again, further inquiry will help determine what they are actually concerned about.
4. With the case example given in the text, Dr. James would do well to have a telephone, if not an in-person, follow-up as soon as possible.
5. Once the "why" question has been answered, Dr. James can decide whether a discussion of religion and spirituality will help uncover the real questions and concerns of this family. It could provide an opportunity for the parents to discuss their fears. It is important for Dr. James to look beyond herself to the needs of the parents.