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PAPERS

Nurturing Spirituality in Healthcare Chaplaincy

A knowledge of non-feasibility and mystery of life and a sense of coherence

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Background

Currently I am active in hospital chaplaincy at Klinikum Stuttgart (online). I am focused on oncology in inpatient contexts, especially in the palliative department. The question of meaning often arises in great intensity with all involved. Lately though, e.g. burnout symptoms and “spiritual dryness”, experienced by religious persons, are increasingly becoming topics in research (Büssing et al. 2016).

Observations

In my view, spirituality includes the question of finding meaning, search for identity, reflection about existential questions of life, connection to fellow human beings and to nature (logotherapeutically speaking) "value" and openness to transcendence. Although associated with very personal experiences and questions, spirituality goes beyond (Schmohl 2015: 30). Already our almost unique possibility to see a patient in real purposelessness can change a great deal atmospherically – also in us, if we are open to it.

1. In this country, religion/spirituality is often perceived as something very personal and at that point I assume that we do not live completely outside this social climate.
2. In my experience, a hospital is a place of intense religious pluralism. That way we are challenged to clarify our own theology – in a much sharper way as it would be the case in the still relatively homogeneous ecclesiastical-parochial context. We have to be aware that we can contribute decisively to resolve these issues through our work.
3. The frequent encounter with severe, abysmal suffering may change one's faith with time (Klessmann 2017). It is essential that we can regularly share our unique life experiences also in worship. Constructive cooperation between the denominations could at that point be very helpful to strengthen our spirituality.
4. To take the time to describe such developments and to work on them scientifically (Karle 2018; Schmohl 2015) can be part of spiritual experience (Schmohl 2017; Schmohl 2018). That is why a highly qualified theological scientific education is indispensable. We are so to speak experiencing fluid shapes of church. Spirituality works (also) in conflict and discourse.

Conclusion

Pastoral care represents a knowledge of non-feasibility and mystery of life, and the great importance of relationship and connectedness in life and in dying (Klessmann 2017). Being there and dwelling on the situation is an important accomplishment that also nurtures our own spirituality. Further research could contribute to strengthen our sense of coherence, internal resources and spirituality.

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