

Words About Wellness

Spirituality and Wellness

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According to the National Cancer Institute, "Spirituality is having to do with deep, often religious, feelings and beliefs, including a person's sense of peace, purpose, connection to others, and beliefs about the meaning of life."(1)

Research has shown that religion and spirituality are associated positively with better health and psychological wellbeing (2,3).

But while much research exists regarding the spiritual needs of patients, far less can be found about the effects of spirituality on the wellness of physicians.

With high levels of burnout reported in PM&R, it's important to know that spirituality can act as a buffer to depression and/or burnout and can enhance wellness.

A 2014 study from the Journal of Contemporary Medical Education showed significant inverse correlations between measures of spirituality and measures of psychological distress/burnout in medical students (4).

Similarly, results from a study of internal medicine residents at Yale University suggested that residents who place a high priority on healthful relationships, engage in an active spiritual life, and practice humility may have important personality traits that protect against burnout (5).

As we all strive to achieve and maintain wellness in our lives, it may be important to make time and space for physical, emotional and spiritual self-care, which includes attention to the purpose and meaning of your work.

Spirituality can be defined as "a belief system focusing on intangible elements that impart vitality and meaning to life's events"(6). It may, or it may not be accompanied by a particular religion.

Whatever religion you observe, or whatever spirituality resonates within you, its practice or acknowledgement may improve your wellness and inspire you to be happier and do more for others in your life, both at work and at home.

I leave you with some passages from The Physician's Prayer, attributed to Moses Maimonides. A copy of it hangs near my office door and I pass by it every day on my way to see my patients. It may or may not resonate with you, but it inspires me and helps me remember why I chose the work that I do every day:

- As I begin the holy work to care for Your Creations, I ask that you grant me the spirit, knowledge, and understanding to help those under my care.

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- Inspire me with love for my art and for Your Creations.
- Do not allow thirst for profit, ambition for renown and admiration, to interfere with my profession, for these are the enemies of truth and of love for mankind and they can lead astray from the great task of attending to the welfare of Your Creations.
- Preserve the strength of my body and of my soul that they ever be ready to cheerfully help and support rich and poor, good and bad, enemy as well as friend.
- In the sufferer let me see only the human being.
- Illumine my mind that it recognize what presents itself and that it may comprehend what is absent or hidden. Let it not fail to see what is visible, but do not permit it to arrogate to itself the power to see what cannot be seen, for delicate and indefinite are the bounds of the great art of caring for the lives and health of Your Creations.
- Should those who are wiser than I wish to improve and instruct me, let my soul gratefully follow their guidance; for vast is the extent of our art.
- Let me be contented in everything, except in the great science of my profession. Never allow the thought to arise in me that I have attained sufficient knowledge. Rather, give me the strength and ambition to ever improve my ability.
- You have chosen me in Your mercy to watch over the life and death of Your Creations. I now apply myself to my profession. Support me in this great task so that it may benefit those around me.

References:

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5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3693690/>
6. Maugans TA. The SPIRITual History. *Archives of Family Medicine*. 1996; 5: 11-16.