Medicine and Spirituality: A New Task for Heart Friends Around the World

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Spirituality is a complex and interdisciplinary part of the human experience. It includes aspects both philosophical and inherent to emotional behaviour. Philosophical aspects include the search for the person's sense of the purpose and truth of life, and for beliefs and values in which he/she lives. Aspects of emotional behaviour include a sense of hope, love and belonging, of inner peace and consolation.

Many people reach their spiritual dimension by religion, through a personal relationship with the divine. Other people find this dimension through a connection with the nature, the arts and the music, or with values and moral principles, or also in the search for scientific truth. Every religion tries to give us a direction and assistance in our spiritual quest, developing a specific set of beliefs, teachings and practices. The relationship of the person with the religious organization is very variable, it can be extremely positive or negative.

The assessment of the spiritual dimension during the medical examination is a way to start the practice of incorporating spirituality into medical practice. The doctor must first learn his/her spiritual values and what he/she believes in, in order to give the necessary attention, without prejudice, when he/she talks to the patient about spiritual concerns. This is particularly true when the thought of the patient is different than the thought of the doctor.

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Received October 1, 2008; revision accepted October 29, 2008

Establishing a positive relationship between doctor and patient is crucial to discuss spiritual issues, and allocating the appropriate time to the matter is very important too. The evaluation of the spiritual resources of the patient may be manifested in the anamnestic debate and the initial conversation and may open the way for more in-depth interviews. During this evaluation of spirituality, issues like the fear of the unknown and the search for hope are important items with which the patient is compared to his/her spiritual dimension. With specific questions, more information can be obtained than by using only standardized tests for a formal assessment of spirituality. The evaluation of spirituality includes questions on issues that will be proposed during the anamnesis in order to determine which factors might play a spiritual role in the disease of the patient, as well as in therapy and healing process.

There are many systems used to conduct a formal assessment of spirituality. They have been especially prepared for religious or as means of investigation; they rarely have been used during a normal medical examination. Doctors have to take into consideration any factor that could affect the health of their patients, maintaining balance and professional ethics.

Doctors can begin to incorporate spirituality into medical practice in three ways: by studying the problem scientifically, applying the techniques for the assessment of spirituality, and by therapeutic intervention. Scientific studies include the evaluation of the connection between spirituality and health and the planning of further studies to clarify its effects. It is always important to keep the mind open to new ways of learning, considering that there will be always things that cannot be understood. Therapeutic interventions include considerations on the spirituality of the patient and recommendations on prevention, health education, treatment and anything that might help the healing

process. Although it is not easy to measure, the physician's ability to provide the necessary compassion and connection, so that the patient can feel the doctor truly present and participating, is an important therapeutic intervention.

Spirituality is an important and multidisciplinary aspect of human experience that is difficult to understand and to completely assess, using only the scientific method. The doctor who begins to integrate spirituality into medical practice should take into consideration the principle of "primum non nocere" and maintain absolute respect for the rights of the patient, in his/her autonomy and freedom of thought and belief. If practiced in a responsible manner, Medicine can make a significant contribution to the integration between Science and Spirituality.

Heart Friends Around The World is an international movement, born on previous experiences of the association, of which maintains the basic structure, including the existing affiliated groups, aiming to promote human health through a route that develops in the body, mind and spirit.

Heart Friends Around The World is affiliated to the International Federation of Cardiology, collaborates with the World Health Organization, and in 1994 had already laid the foundations of its existence by involving in its programs physicians, cardiologists and patients worldwide, predominantly coming from low- and middle-income countries, to promote prevention and rehabilitation of cardiovascular disease. The following paragraphs illustrate the Heart Friends Around The World Manifesto, whose vision is to promote the Good by the promotion of health and whose mission is a global health promotion, in its aspects of body, mind, spirit.

Heart Friends Around The World believes in the importance of everyday life, in the relationship between body and mind, in the development of interpersonal relationships. It also considers the education of women as a priority for her health and that of his family.

Heart Friends Around The World believes that old age is an asset in the search for spiritual life, and that young people are a resource of health and values, although nowadays are mortified by excesses both in consumerism and in deprivation.

Heart Friends Around The World believes that the body needs a balanced diet in its supply of water, sugars, proteins and fats, recommending the consumption of fruit and vegetables several times a day. As the hunger must be fought, so the excessive introduction of calories, leading to obesity, diabetes and development of chronic non-communicable diseases, must be avoided.

Heart Friends Around The World proposes the practice of a regular physical activity, with a medium muscle commitment. A slow and prolonged race practice is a good basis for maintaining the health and the associated state of mental and physical well-being.

Heart Friends Around The World believes that the proper use of drugs can help to maintain the state of health obtained by the treatment of the disease. It also believes that the pharmacological correction of potential risk factors is a practice to be fostered, according to the results of updated scientific publications. It also proposes to take action in order to produce new drugs at low cost, so that they can be used even in developing countries, protecting its right to health as an inalienable well for the human being.

Heart Friends Around The World considers that, in the relationship between doctor and patient, the positive attitude is a vital component to get that confidence, that mutual trust, which is so important for the recovery of health status.

Heart Friends Around The World finds its essence in the relationship between doctor and patient, striving to have a consistently positive attitude towards the patient and receiving in return what has been given in the form of Good for its professional and spiritual growth. The right man acts the Good for love of the Good, lives in the Good, in an independent manner by religion or no religion to which he belongs.

Heart Friends Around The World is in continuous search for figures of mystical expression such as religious, poets and philosophers who can indicate to us the most appropriate spiritual journey, namely that journey that opens us to a far greater reality and that helps us to expand our conscience. These figures will be proposed through their writings, so that everyone can have the freedom to create their own spiritual way.

Heart Friends Around The World is confident in the creativity of all the healthcare workers and citizens who recognize the Manifesto, so that they can be are carriers of dissemination of this thought.