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The Place of Spirituality in Providing Care for the Whole Person

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Most persons within the health care community would affirm what has been termed, "Wholistic Care" or a 'Caring for the Whole Person, Body, Mind and Spirit.' It is the opinion of the author of these lesson plans that while health care professionals are doing a wonderful job caring for the body as well as the mind of their clients, that few professionals understand how to 'care for the spirit.'

"Caring for the Spirit" has traditionally taken the form of making sure that appropriate religious rituals and expressions are made available to clients as they overtly express the desire for such rituals and expressions. Sometimes this advocacy has taken form of health care professionals referring clients to the spiritual leader of the client's faith tradition or, if available, to the Department of Spiritual (Pastoral?) Care. It has meant making sure that a Koran was available and within reach of a devout Muslim. It meant providing the space and time for 'Eucharistic Ministers' to provide comfort through what Christians call, "Holy Communion." Providing for the spiritual in a client has been a matter of contact and referral rather than direct client-caregiver interchange. While these practices are laudable and must be continued, there is much more to 'Caring for the Spirit: than providing for religious expression.

For many even the term 'spiritual' and "spirituality' and 'religion' evokes a vision of exclusive rituals that are meaningful for some, but not all. Throughout training, health care professionals are coached about not imposing any religious tradition upon clients. For many, religion is seen as being exclusive and divisive rather than inclusive and connecting. The religious needs for expression of a Buddhist seem to be very different from the needs of a Jew. How can a professional who is Hindu able to know the detailed religious needs of a Catholic Christian? How can a professional, who has no personal religious tradition, hope to understand the sometimes subtle differences between the many strands of Buddhism?

And yet, many health care professionals, in the course of providing exceptional service to clients, become keenly aware that their efforts are touching a person in ways that are beyond the body and the mind. These persons privately speak of intimate moments where meaning rather than science captured the moment. Many of these professionals intuitively know that there is more to the human body than that which can be measured by x-ray or blood test, but have difficulty finding the words, the concepts, the paradigms,

that allow them to touch the human spirit while not stumbling over religious practice. This DVD presentation by Mel Kimble, as well as the lesson plans that are available to accompany this DVD, seeks to provide a means whereby health care professionals can indeed “Care for the Spirit” of all persons, no matter what the religious belief or non-belief that is a part of the psyche of either the caregiver or the client.

The ‘trick’ is simple, though not easy: focus upon a clients spiritual *journey* and not on the content of that journey. This concept is based upon the principle that while all persons may not participate in religion or religious expression, that everyone has a spirituality, a means of making meaning of life and living. All health care professionals, no matter what their preference regarding religion, can affirm the spiritual journey (changes) that are happening in a clients life, a journey that is often evoked by the very needs that have given rise to the client/caregiver relationship in the first place. The secret of providing quality care for the spirit is for the caregiver to encourage and affirm the journey while allowing the client to infuse to that journey with terms and concepts that are appropriate and comfortable for them, be they religious or philosophical.