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## Spirituality in health care and the industrial workplace

Mojoyinola Jacob Kehinde<sup>1</sup> and Ajala Emmanuel Majekodunmi<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Spirituality, with many and varied definitions, plays many useful roles in clients' lives. In health care settings, it is effective in enhancing physical and mental health, in reducing symptoms of illness, in coping with illness, in treatment and recovery from illness. Similarly, in industrial organizations, spirituality helps to improve employees' performance, organizational effectiveness, support organizational performances enhance employees' well-being, provides them with the sense of meaning at work and a sense of interconnectedness. In view of the above, the paper explains the meaning of spirituality, and explains its positive contributions to health and industrial welfare. The paper concludes that when the health care and industrial workplace spirituality is properly understood by health care-givers and industrial welfare officers they will be adequately equipped to meet the spiritual challenges of their patients or clients. Also, they will be able to identify the clients' spiritual beliefs and strengths that motivate them in the healing process or to improve their productivity at the workplace.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Health care, Illness, Industrial workplace, Employees, Performance.

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## Introduction

Spirituality has been described as the basic essence of the individual, as well as how an individual finds meaning and purpose through relationship with self, others and a higher power. The word "spirituality" refers to a person's or a group's relationship with the transcendent. According to Astrow, Puchalski and Sulmasy (2001), spirituality has been characterized as experiential process whose features include quest for meaning and purpose, transcendence (i.e. the sense that being human is more than simple material existence), connectedness (e.g. with others, nature, or divine) and values (e.g. love, compassion and justice). It appears that compared to religion, spirituality is a broader concept and most institutionalized religions aim to foster spirituality (Sulmasy, 2002). It is also important to remember that religiosity and spirituality are not mutually exclusive concepts and therefore they can overlap and also exist separately.

Spirituality has been defined as the beliefs and practices that develop based on personal values and ideology of the meaning and purpose of life (Drescher and Foy, 1995). It refers to the belief that there is a power or powers outside of one's own that transcend understanding (Decker, 1993). Jenkins (1997) defined spirituality as the human response to a mysterious, transcendent other, who for unknown reasons cares enough about us to initiate a relationship with us. It is a subtle bodily feeling with vague meanings involving a transcendent growth process. According to Mahrer (1996), spirituality refers to some kinds of relationships between the person and higher force, being power of God. It refers to the beliefs of individuals which permeate all areas of their life, and influence attitudes, beliefs, values and health. It involves the ways in which people fulfill what they hold to be the purpose of their lives, a search for the meaning of life, and a sense of connectedness to the universe. Its universality extends across creed and culture, and at the same time, it is very personal and unique to each person. It is a sacred realm of human experience which produces in man qualities such as love, honesty, patience, tolerance, compassion, faith and hope.

Spirituality includes introspection, and the development of an individual's inner life through practices such as prayer, meditation and contemplation. It has been stated that there are three dimensions to spirituality: making personal meaning out of situations, coming to an understanding of self, and appreciating the importance of connection with others (Burkhardt, 1994).

Spirituality is an important coping mechanism because individuals seek meaning when experiencing severe illness (Lukoff, 2007). In *health care settings, spirituality is increasingly being recognized as an important aspect of health and well-being of people with chronic health conditions. It gives meaning to people's lives and may be an important coping resource that enables people with chronic conditions to manage their conditions and workers to overcome excessive job stress. In addition, it is central to finding meaning, comfort and inner peace, which helps people transcend their condition and incorporate it into their self-concept (transformation).*

Spirituality in industrial organizations or workplaces has been defined as our inner consciousness (Guillory, 2000), a specific form of work feeling that energizes action (Dehler and Welsh, 1994), a process of self-enlightenment (Barnett, Krell and Sendry, 2000), access to the sacred force that impels life (Nash and McLennan, 2001), and the unique inner search for the fullest development through participation into transcendent mystery (Delbecq, 1999).

Spirituality is significant in human existence and human endeavours, hence the present paper is based on how it enhances health, coping with adjustment and recovery from illness in the health care sector. The paper also looks at how spirituality will facilitate positive well-being among industrial workers, and enhance job and organizational performance.

## **Nature and importance of spirituality in health care and the industrial workplace**

This paper sees spirituality in health care and the industrial workplace to be in the form of spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, muscle relaxation, yoga sessions, corporate chaplaincies, spiritual wellness and balance programmes, environmental programmes, multi-faith prayer spaces, etc. This in line with the views of Mitroff and Denton (1999) and Krishnakumar and Neck (2002). Spirituality also includes reading religious or spiritual books (such as the Bible or the Koran), and listening to religious or spiritual songs or music (Mojoyinola, 2010).

From review of some empirical studies, it is clear that there are significant relationships between spirituality (spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices), health, psychosocial adjustment, recovery from illness, employee's general well-being, job satisfaction, productivity and organizational performance (Tonigan, 2003; Jesse and Reed, 2004; Beirly, Kessler and Christensen, 2000). All the above relationships necessitate at looking at the usefulness of spirituality in health care and at the industrial workplace under the following headings:

### **1. Coping with illness or disease**

Rowe and Allen (2004) found that spiritual beliefs help patients to cope favourably with their disease. For instance, spirituality had a significant impact on coping with chronic illness. Kaczorowski (1989) found that individuals with cancer have lower anxiety because of their high spirituality. Spirituality has also helped patients to cope with gynaecological disease and pain (Brady, Peterman, Fitchett & Cella, 1999; Robberts, Brown, Elkins & Larson, 1997). Baetz and Bowen (2008) found that chronic pain and fatigue sufferers who were both religious and spiritual were more likely to have better psychological well-being and to use positive coping strategies.



## **2. Psycho-social adjustment/adaptation to illness**

Spirituality has positive association with psychosocial adjustment or adaptation to illness. For instance, McNulty, Livneh and Wilson (2004), found that spiritual well-being exerts an appreciable influence on adaptation to multiple sclerosis, where it demonstrated a mediator effect. Spiritual well-being has also been found to be associated positively with overall adjustment, hopefulness and quality of life in patients with chronic illnesses other than multiple sclerosis (Carson, Soekan, Shanty and Tarry, 1990; Colton et al., 1999; Tuck, McCain and Elswick, 2001). Spirituality enhanced the sense of being whole (Fallot, 1998; Fallot, 2001), was influential to psychological well-being (Rowe and Allen, 2004) and facilitates a higher level of adjustment (Lewis, 2001).

## **3. Enhancement of physical and mental health**

Spirituality enhances positive physical and mental health. For instance, Jesse and Reed (2004) found that high level of spirituality (spiritual perspective and religiosity) were significantly correlated with greater satisfaction with social support, high levels of self-esteem and decreased levels of smoking. Tonigan (2003), in a study among patients with alcohol dependence, reported that spirituality predicted behaviours such as honesty and responsibility which in turn promoted alcohol abstinence. Spirituality has also been associated with happiness and life satisfaction (Lewis, 2001). The other health benefits of spirituality (having strong faith) may include increased longevity, less anxiety, coping better with stressful life events, lower blood pressure and stronger immune systems (Kissman and Maurer, 2002).

## **4. Facilitating recovery from physical and mental illness**

In line with the finding of Pulchalski (2001), spiritual commitment tends to enhance recovery from illness and surgery. Lindgreen and Coursey (1995) found that 83 percent of psychiatric patients felt that spiritual beliefs had a positive impact on their illness through the

comfort they provided, and the feeling of being cared for and not being alone that was engendered. Ironson, Stutzle and Flecher (2006) found that people who had increased spirituality/religiousness showed less disease progression.

Rajakumar, Jillings, Osborne and Tognazzini (2008) explored the role of spirituality in the process of recovering from depression and found that spirituality played a significant role for participants in their recovery which was experienced as connections. These connections enabled the participants to form relationships with God or a higher power, self, others, and nature and through these relationships they found meaning and purpose in their lives.

#### **5. Reducing fear of death and death rate**

Spirituality helps in reducing fear of death and death rate. In a study among HIV positive patients, Kaldjian, Jekel, and Friedland (1998) found that those who were spiritually active had less fear of death and less guilt. Also, a study suggests that people who have regular spiritual practices tend to live longer (Strawbridge, Cohen, Shema and Kaplan, 1997). Breedle et al. (2011) found spiritual well-being helpful in creating a peaceful death among cancer patients and concluded that health care providers should find a way to address the spiritual needs of the dying and promote a more peaceful death experience. Lewis (2001) found that spirituality maintains meaning for those nearing the end of life, and provides support in the process of death and dying.

#### **6. Enhancement of employee's well-being**

Spirituality has been found effective in enhancing the general well-being of employees. A growing number of managers and employees are reported to resort to meditation, reflection and spiritual practices and wellness programmes, as well as fitness and sports exercises at work as a method of coping with stress and uncertainty at work (Dehler and Welsh, 1994; Cartwright and Cooper, 1997). Research by Fahri (2010) found that the development and expression of

spirituality at the workplace solved problems of stress and burnout, as well as having beneficial consequences for the well-being of employees.

### **7. Facilitating positive individual level outcomes**

Reave (2005) found growing evidence that spirituality at the industrial workplace enhance results in positive individual level outcomes for employees such as increased joy, serenity, job satisfaction and commitment. Milliman, Czaplewski and Ferguson (2003) found a positive correlation between industrial workplace spirituality and employee attitudes such as commitment to the organization, intrinsic work satisfaction and job involvement.

### **8. Enhancement of job performance and organizational productivity**

Spirituality programmes improve organizational productivity and reduces absenteeism and turnover. This is confirmed by the work of Fry (2003) and Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) who found that spirituality programmes improve organizational productivity and reduce absenteeism and turnover. More employers today are encouraging spirituality in the organizational workplace as a way to enhance employee morale, commitment and productivity.

### **9. Facilitating increased organizational performance**

Spirituality facilitates increased organizational performance. For instance, research suggests that fostering spirituality and allowing free expression of spirituality at work enables employees to feel complete and authentic at work (Burack, 1999). This leads to a high degree of personal fulfillment and morale which in turn results in increased organizational performance (Turner, 1999). Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) suggest that the encouragement of spirituality in the industrial workplace can lead to benefits in the areas of creativity, honesty, personal fulfillment, and commitment, which will ultimately lead to increased organizational performance.

### **10. Promoting sense of meaning and purpose**

Incorporating spirituality at work provides employees and managers with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose at work. For instance, Lips-Wiersma (2002) associates spirituality with finding meaning and purpose in life and living in accordance with this meaning and deeply held beliefs. Mitroff and Denton (1999) found that organizations that have a stronger sense of spirituality enable employees to exercise stronger values and ethical beliefs in their workplace and empower them to show more creativity and flexibility at work. They also found that workers who can express their spirituality through their work actually find work more satisfying and meaningful and accordingly perform better. This is in line with Gull and Doh (2004), who propose that employees become more engaged and can work more responsibly, ethically, collaboratively and creatively when they find meaning in their work activities.

### **11. Promoting sense of community and interconnectedness**

Incorporating spirituality at work provides organizational members with a sense of community and interconnectedness, which increases their attachment, loyalty and belonging to the organization. The consequences of spiritual experiences at work include higher levels of employee attachment, loyalty and belongingness (Duchon and Plowman, 2005) with consequences such as intimacy, wholeness, authenticity, altruism and integrity (Burack, 1999).

In the spiritual literature, spirituality is often linked to positive outcomes and benefits associated with the "sense of community", such as unifying and building community (Cavanagh, Hanson, Hanson and Hinojoso, 2001), serving the need for connecting to others at work, and being the source of daily expressions of compassion, wisdom and connectedness (Marxwell, 2003), and consideration towards others at work (Milliman, Czaplewski and Ferguson, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

Holistic approaches to health care which focus upon the relationships between a patient's mind, body, and spirit are necessary components of well-being. However, the spiritual dimension of this complex relationship is often left unattended. As a result of this, spirituality in health care and industrial settings becomes very necessary.

In industrial organizations, stress caused by workaholism and long hours at work can result in loss of spirituality, chronic illness, pain, fatigue, fear and guilt, hence industrial workplace spiritualism becomes very important. As discussed in this paper, spirituality in health care enhances coping with illness, disease, physical health, mental health and recovery from illness. Furthermore, industrial workplace spirituality facilitates employee satisfaction, commitment, performance, productivity and organizational performance. Hence, spirituality in health care and the industrial workplace plays useful roles in the performance of social work activities.

It can be concluded that when the health care and industrial workplace spirituality is properly understood by health care-givers and industrial welfare officers they will be adequately equipped to meet the spiritual challenges of their patients or clients. They will also be able to identify the clients' spiritual beliefs and strengths that motivate them in the healing process or improve their productivity at the workplace.

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