
Illions of words have been written about achieving overall well-being, the balancing of the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of a healthy lifestyle in order to maintain a sense of wellness. Certainly, the thoughts in this column will probably not persuade radical changes in thinking about any one factor that contributes to wellness. Rather, it is intended simply to encourage you to think about possibilities. In particular, those possibilities reflected by the complex enigma commonly acknowledged as the spirit.

Understanding the spiritual aspects of wellness doesn’t necessarily mean you have to accept a particular belief system in order to use the tools, techniques, and perspectives developed as practical applications of spiritual concepts. These can be incorporated into the individual’s personal interpretation that allows for many different paths and approaches.

What is Spirituality?
Spirituality can be described as one’s relationship with life. It is any practice that helps you connect to your inner self and a process that works for you. Perhaps it is a functional guide toward purpose and meaning to life; a sense of awakening from being trapped in limiting perspectives; an opportunity to learn by listening to your body, feelings, and intuition; a practice offering an expanded level of consciousness and awareness that facilitates personal growth yet also respects the autonomy of each person to decide what is right for them.

Spirituality and Science
Healthy well-being is the natural and best condition for living. Personal health is a complex system, not only physical but also emotional, mental, and spiritual. The concept of spirit is recognized by science as a component of healing, and we have all seen patients with strong spiritual beliefs and attitudes that appear to have impact on both good and bad outcomes.

Studies have shown that persons with spiritual attitudes do not need scientific proof to show that energy and positive thoughts can heal. Although healthcare provider attitudes vary on the issue, the medical and nursing communities are paying attention to the issue of spirituality. A number of small studies noted in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), June 16, 2004, indicated that patients want physicians to consider their spiritual needs. A study published in the November 2000 issue of Oncology found that nurses and physicians who described themselves as religious were less subject to emotional exhaustion. A 2001 study from Duke University indicated that heart surgery patients who have people praying for them appear to recover better than those who didn’t. More recently, a repeat study reported by the same researchers (July 2005) concluded that those who were prayed for were as likely to have immediate complications, be readmitted, or die within six months as those not prayed for. In spite of the mixed findings, scientists agree that further research is warranted into alternative mechanisms for patient care. Recent reports also show the significant influence of music, massage therapy, cognitive behavior modification, positive outlooks, and other modalities on patients who demonstrate less stressful responses to circumstances such as having surgery. Clearly, there is emerging evidence that the mind and spirit can affect the body’s response and may be a positive factor in the process of healing.

Health, Spirituality, and Courage
Being healthy enables us to participate fully in life. Maintaining our own health enhances the quality of our lives. A better understanding of the spiritual aspects of our own health is a movement forward in achieving a more positive attitude and willingness to examine ourselves without illusions or excuses; without a doubt, a courageous ideal for anyone to consider.

Courage comes from the word “heart” and gives us strength to do what is right. Courage comes from within and motivates us to do what is best despite difficulty. It supports our ability to deal with the unpleasant aspects of life such as...
stress, anxiety, tension, worry, frustration, anger, conflict, sadness, apprehension, and grief. Courage and spiritual awareness are inner directed, offering freedom to make mistakes. Courage also confers responsibility, an ancient word that measures actions in which each individual is ultimately responsible for their own choices.

We know that complex systems can be reduced to the lowest denominator. A symphony can be reduced to a single instrument—an automobile to four wheels and a frame, the functionality of the human body to the brain, heart, and lungs. Why not consider spirituality as vital to a complex system that can be better understood if we are willing to explore the possibilities?

Your mind is a wonderful tool that allows you to reason and use logic—to learn to accommodate new information, to change, resolve problems, be creative, and meet challenges. Your mind is the part of you that is able to direct and control the things that happen in your existence. The mind sets the tone, the body responds.

We experience the physical world by means of sensory perception. Sensory awareness is enhanced by memory, imagination, emotions, thoughts, and intuition. It is also the part within you that chooses to be aware and experience “who you are” and be simply here in the moment. It is the “self” in the word “yourself.” By adding other concepts like serenity, harmony, attitudes, intentions, and thoughts, can we not begin to see the potential for the positive attributes of goodness, truth, beauty, reality, creativity, balance, patience, and wholeness as a sense of spirituality? It would seem that having an open mind and learning from every experience enables us to better understand the universe and interact with it in intelligent ways.

In that context, it seems that spirituality is centered in reality. Reality implies being true to yourself. It requires us to be aware of ourselves in a moment of time and to be present in that place and time. It consists of just learning to be and simply living in the moment. A major first step is to deliberately step away from the business of daily living and concentrate on being who you are. If you are stuck in a rut, frozen in place, then change something internally, begin with thoughts and attitudes, and move forward. Start building and developing the ability to be self aware and honest with your self. Find a way to quiet the chatter of the mind and more easily separate yourself from the role you usually play in life, from responsibilities and opinions, to a calming center within that connects you to a larger more mindful way of thinking, noticing, and paying attention to everything around you. Changes in patterns of thought, emotions and behaviors may then occur. Change brings growth.

Conclusion
Willingness to committing time and attention to the spiritual dimension of wellness is a way to begin to explore your own well being. There are many paths to help you, many techniques to assist your journey. What is important is what works for you. Being whole is simple and unique to you. Stop! Be still! Listen! It is how you gain energy and awareness.

"Where the spirit does not work with the hand, there is no art!"

Leonardo da Vinci

Office-Based Research Grant Applications Available

The Office-Based Research Grant (OBR) will be awarded to a CRNA researcher studying anesthesia outcomes in the office setting. The grant will be awarded up to the maximum amount of $10,000.

Criteria for Selection
The investigator must be a CRNA and AANA member and must be capable of conducting a research study regarding quality anesthesia care.

Deadline date: July 1
For further information and an application, visit the AANA Foundation Web page at www.aana.com/foundation, email jspliopolus@aana.com, or call the AANA Foundation at (847) 655-1173.

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