Caregiver Wellness: “U” Model – Spiritual Wellness

Eboni Green, Ph.D., RN
Caregiver Support Services

Introduction

Caring for a loved one or client suffering from a debilitating or terminal illness can be distressing. The feeling of distress often compounds when there is little hope that your loved one’s suffering will be eased or that her condition will improve. The resulting long-term emotional strain can lead you to question in general the meaning of life and can result in spiritual distress. It is important to recognize that there can be serious implications for your health and relationships if you are not spiritually well. Spiritual wellness does not necessarily relate to religious activities or rituals; rather, spiritual wellness focuses on the activity of adding meaning to your life and the lives of those for whom you care. In fact, spirituality can serve as a protective factor against negative health outcomes among caregivers.

The following quotation is from a family caregiver:

The stress that is involved in taking care of your loved one takes such a great toll on one’s mental and physical state of mind. I pray to God daily to give me the strength and courage to go on with the things that happen to me. (Response 33)

Objectives

In this poster board session, participants will be introduced to the Caregiver Wellness: U Model, with an emphasis on spiritual wellness, empowerment, and resilience. You will be given the opportunity to assess their level of wellness according to the “U” Model. You will also be asked to share their personal definition of spiritual wellness.

Caregiver Wellness: U Model

Low-level wellness. Low-level wellness or caregiver distress is almost always synonymous with crisis situations, care transitions, or induction to caregiving (i.e., when a caregiver is first called to care for a sick or disabled loved one). Although each of the pieces to the puzzle is present in the wellness model when the caregiver is in distress, none of the pieces connect. Low-level wellness or caregiver distress will likely continue until the caregiver is empowered to reach out for help with caregiving (i.e., may come from a health care professional, friend, or family member). There is no set time frame, however, for the caregiver to move from distress to manageable stress (medium-level wellness); there must be workable solutions, access to information and resources, and intervention strategies deemed helpful by the caregiver. Low-level wellness is not healthy for the caregiver or the caregiver’s loved one. We hypothesize that the movement from low-level to medium-level wellness is dependent on the caregiver being empowered to seek assistance or ask for help.

Medium-level wellness. The movement from low-level wellness to medium-level wellness is precipitated by the caregiver being empowered to reach out for and accept assistance and is accompanied by resilience (or the act of making adjustments). According to the model, once a caregiver reaches medium-level wellness, the puzzle pieces representing empowerment and resilience are connected. The new resilient and empowered caregiver takes self-responsibility, which is evidenced by the actions of making adjustments and accessing services needed for the benefit of the caregiver and his or her loved one. It should be noted that the stress that accompanies medium-level wellness may not be immediately relieved until there is a level of comfort with interventions and supports accessed by the caregiver. For example, if the home care agency is not dependable or there is a sudden change in the mental or physical status of a loved one, a caregiver may return to a stressful situation until he or she is once again empowered to seek additional assistance and support. We hypothesize that the movement to medium-level wellness is dependent on the caregiver being empowered to seek assistance with caregiving and being resilient in trying new approaches to the caregiving situation.

Optimum wellness. The term optimum wellness refers to the movement from medium-level wellness to high-level wellness. Once adequate supports for a sick or disabled loved one are in place, the caregiver has the opportunity to move from stress to optimum wellness by placing emphasis on integrating all pieces of the puzzle. It is important to note that integration to optimum wellness is a process that will take time; it is not recommended that the integration occur at once, nor is it likely to. We hypothesize that the movement to optimum wellness is dependent on the integration of empowerment, resilience, and reaching a point of stability with physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and fiscal wellness.

Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual wellness is a part of the Caregiver Wellness: U Model, a conceptual model that incorporates the movement toward social, psychological, physical, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, and financial wellness, while also incorporating the empowerment and resilience necessary to take charge of your health on a holistic basis. The components are not chronological, rather, they represent collective components. According to the Caregiver Wellness: U Model, spiritual wellness incorporates the experience of caring for another to find new meaning in life that can include religion, faith, belief, and self-actualization, each of which has been associated with positive health outcomes.

Are you spiritually well?

Please take this opportunity to evaluate your spiritual wellness. There are five statements; consider each statement openly and honestly. Assign two points (2) if you do not agree with the statement and one point (1) if you somewhat agree, and do not assign any points (0) if you agree with the statement.

I have someone with whom I feel comfortable talking about my spiritual needs.
I am able to take time away from caregiving to attend to my spiritual needs (i.e., reading the Bible, going to church, prayer, meditation).
I have an hour or two to myself to pursue personal interests.
I am at peace with myself and my life.
I am satisfied with my level of work, socialization, and volunteering.

Evaluate your spiritual wellness score

A score of 7 or higher may indicate that you might want to reach out to improve your spiritual base.
A score between 4 and 6 may indicate that you are doing okay spiritually.
A score between 0 and 3 may indicate that you are spiritually well.

The Roles of Empowerment & Resilience

• The term empowerment is defined as the ability to engage in and execute behaviors for successful caregiving.
• Resilience is the caregiver’s ability to adjust and adapt to the ever-changing roles associated with caring for a sick or disabled loved one or client in a healthy and flexible way.

Let’s put the focus on U!

Let’s put the focus on U! Caregiver Support Services PO Box 4291 Omaha, NE 68104 Phone: (844) 383-CARE (2273) Email: caregiversupport@aol.com Website: www.caregiversupportservices.org

Self-Care

Tap into your spiritual gifts. Are you aware of your caregiver-related spiritual gifts? If the answer is no, take a moment to jot down the things that you feel you do best and enjoy in your role as a caregiver. One tip is that spiritual gifts are generally described as natural talents or areas where you excel. Natural talents generally have common themes and are the things that you have loved to do for a lifetime. A majority of people do not have the opportunity to focus on what they do best and therefore might not be aware of their spiritual gifted. Take the time to develop your spiritual gifts; doing so is more important to your success than you might think. Take time to do what revitalizes you spiritually: Some individuals enjoy going to church or social gatherings, whereas others gain spiritual strength from more private activities like reading or saying a silent prayer. Make sure you take time to recharge spiritually.

Try not to compare your spiritual strengths to those of others. It is important not to compare the spiritual gifts of another with what you are doing. Sometimes caregivers recognize the spiritual gifts of another and wish to possess those gifts rather than being satisfied with their own. Take time to appreciate what you do well and recognize that there is value in what you are doing.

Reach out to someone you trust. If you are experiencing spiritual distress, reach out to someone you trust, such as your pastor or a confidant. It is vitally important to have someone with whom you can talk about how you are feeling. If your distress is not dissolved, it might be time to seek help from a professional counselor or therapist.

Self-Care
Do a selfish deed
Feel the power of prayer
Use visualization to return to a good “place”
Sing your heart out in a choir
Give thanks for good days and wonderful memories
Embrace nature: watch the snow fall
Take time to just sit and do nothing
Read an inspirational book or poem—even if you can only read a couple pages each day

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