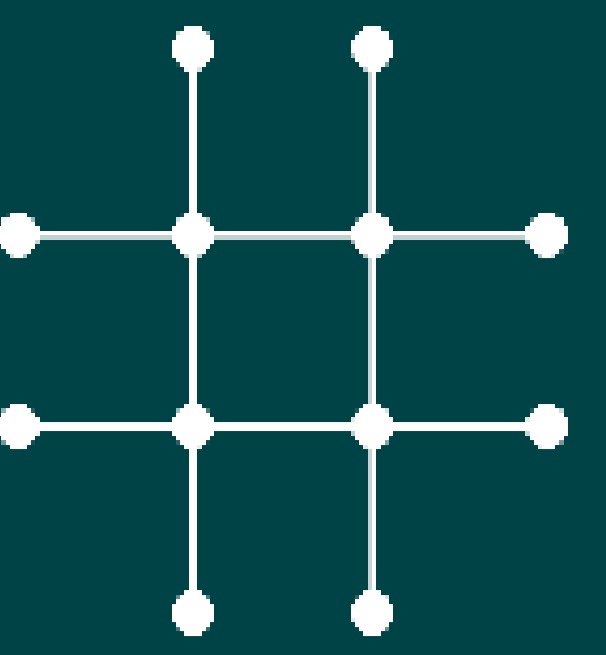


The meaning of spirituality and dignity in old age



VID

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Introduction

In most European healthcare services, dignified care in old age is a high priority. This study explores older peoples' understanding of dignity and its significance in caring, and is based on the notion that dignity and spirituality are interconnected^{1,2}. Paying attention to the spiritual dimension of life may support patients' dignity as human beings.

**There are so many varieties of spirituality
To come out one day – one morning, birds sing, quiet,**



**and this with the children of course. And good conversations
with friends... when you think about spirituality,
then I think somehow of God**

Material and methods

- A qualitative methodological approach inspired by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics
- Each participant invited to two conversations; 30 interviews
- 17 older people, 6 men and 11 women, age 74-96 years
- 6 participants lived independently, 5 were home healthcare recipients, 6 were nursing home residents

The interviews began with insight into the participants' horizon by allowing them to share some of their life history with the researcher. Three main themes guided the dialogues, together with open-ended questions.

Interviews – example questions

Spirituality

- How do you express your spirituality?
- What other words do you associate with spirituality?
- What life experiences have been important to how you understand your own spirituality?
- What is important or meaningful in your life?

Spiritual care

- What is spiritual care for you?
- What is the role of the family?
- How should health professionals respond to spiritual needs?

Dignity

- What is dignity for you?
- What is important for a dignified life in old age?
- How do nurses strengthen or weaken the patient's dignity through how they perform their care?

Findings

Dignity:

- comprises "the whole person"
- cannot be lost, but it can be graded
- everyone is entitled to dignity no matter the circumstances

Maintain dignity:

- must feel valued and appreciated, and also give back
- to be there for another person in everyday life
- care that includes to "wish somebody well"

Spiritual care underpins human dignity:

- important to recognize the other, it can be to sit down and talk
- means a lot because it gives the feeling of being seen and appreciated
- although material things must be in place, patients also need something spiritual, like the priest, music and art, nature, social relations, etc.
- spiritual care can "uplift the spirit"
- a dignified old age means that the family is present, that older people feel they are not abandoned or put in a nursing home just to die, they must feel loved and "alive"



**Feeling mutual love and being
cared for is essential and may foster
dignity in old age**

Conclusions

The findings portray how dignity is always present and comprises the whole human being. Furthermore, feeling mutual love and being cared for is essential and may foster dignity in old age. The findings also point to how spiritual care underpins dignity through uplifting the spirit, feeling alive, and being valued.

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