

Effectiveness of Spiritual Life Review (SLR) on Spirituality and Resilience among Cancer Survivors.

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BACKGROUND/PURPOSE: A cancer diagnosis often provokes existential questioning concerning meaning, identity, and spirituality. Clinical practice at the VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam, indicated that spiritual life review (methodically reviewing and writing about one's existential and spiritual development) may ease this questioning, and strengthens spirituality (connectedness to oneself, to others, and to a larger meaning or presence) and resilience (the ability to access internal and external sources in dealing with life's contingencies, setbacks and threats). The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a structured spiritual life review protocol (SLR) among cancer survivors.

METHODS: Mixed-methods effect study; duration 3.5 years. N = 57; Cancer patients (all cancer types) treated >0.5 year prior to the study (all treatment modalities), participated. Patient-reported outcomes (primary study parameters SAIL, NEIS, and RYFF) were completed at baseline, post-intervention, 3 and 9 months' follow-up. Self-assessments were conducted immediately post-intervention, and interviews 9 months post-intervention.

RESULTS: Scores on the Spiritual Attitudes and Interests List (meaning making, trust, acceptance, spiritual activities) significantly improved from pre-SLR, to post-SLR, and 3 months post-SLR. Scores on eudaimonic well-being (spiritual well-being (inner strength, relation with a higher power) and psychological well-being (goals in life, self-acceptance) also significantly improved from preSLR to post-SLR and 3 months post-SLR. Results on the self-assessments and interviews corroborated these findings.

CONCLUSIONS: SLR improves psychological and spiritual well-being, and resilience. SLR effectively leads to articulation and development of one's spirituality, and to an increased understanding of the internal and external sources available to oneself.

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Research Implications: This study increases our understanding of the relationship between existential questioning, narrative approaches to spiritual development, and resilience. Further research has to be undertaken to compare the intervention group with a control group. Furthermore, predictive factors of effectiveness of SLR can be investigated, not only concerning patient related aspects (such as socio-demographic, psychological and medical factors), but also concerning the types of biographies produced. These insights will deepen our understanding of the target group that benefits most of the intervention, and of the crucial narrative and spiritual elements that produce the effect of SLR. Ultimately, this will give us further insight in the therapeutic potentiality of narrative approaches to spiritual development in supporting people confronted with illness and existential questioning.

Practice Implications: Based on the insight that SLR effectively develops and strengthens spirituality, well-being and resilience, this intervention can be offered to support cancer survivors confronted with existential questioning. Moreover, different target groups can be explored, and innovative applications such as e-health modules can be developed.

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