



REFERENCES:

This information was summarized or adapted from:

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Finding Meaning or Purpose in My Life.

City of Hope SupportScreen Educational Materials 2016.

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Department of Supportive Care Medicine
Patient, Family and Community Education

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LIFE AFTER CANCER: SPIRITUAL HEALTH

“The world is full of suffering but is also full of the overcoming of it.”

— Helen Keller



FINDING MEANING OR PURPOSE OF ILLNESS

Our patients often tell us that when coping with cancer, they think about spirituality, including:

- The purpose of life
- The meaning of illness and suffering
- What they value most in life

People often search for a “meaning” from their experience with catastrophic illness. A serious illness like cancer may cause some patients or family caregivers to have doubts about their beliefs or religious values. Some may feel that they are being punished by God or may have a loss of faith after being diagnosed. This is known as spiritual distress and it is normal.

Others may find that their faith, religion or sense of spirituality is a source of strength. For some, they feel that through their faith, they are able to find meaning in their lives and make sense of their cancer experience.

SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION MAY HAVE DIFFERENT MEANINGS

The terms spirituality and religion are often used in place of each other, but for many people they have different meanings. Spirituality includes, but is not limited to the practice of religion, meditation, mindfulness and connection.

- Religion is usually a specific set of beliefs and practices, usually within an organized group/community.
- Spirituality may be defined as a person’s sense of peace, purpose and connection to others, and beliefs about the meaning of life.
- People may think of themselves as spiritual or religious or both.

Regardless of how it is practiced, spirituality is an important aspect and a source of comfort after a major illness like cancer.

TRANSCENDENCE

For most people, cancer brings with it a change in outlook on life. These changes can bring a new meaning to life and be a positive spiritual experience. Spirituality can also help with the healing and coming to terms with what has happened to you. This is known as transcendence.

A 2015 study by the Moffitt Cancer Center, showed that people who found feelings of transcendence, meaning or peace reported feeling the least physical problems. The findings show that there is potentially a link between religious or spiritual beliefs and better physical health reported by patients with cancer (Jim, 2015).

CHAPLAINS AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELING MAY HELP

City of Hope is committed to providing the best care for your body, mind, and spirit. Whether you consider yourself religious, spiritual or nonreligious, our chaplains are available for patients, family members and caregivers to provide support in the way that best suits you. They can:

- Offer compassionate listening.
- Address your spiritual or religious needs and concerns.
- Provide spiritual support and counsel.
- Provide ministry of presence: to sit with you and offer loving presence with or without words.

OTHER WAYS YOU MAY FIND COMFORT AND MEANING

Spiritual distress may affect physical and emotional health and may make it harder for people to cope with cancer and cancer treatment. Speaking to someone about your feelings may be helpful.

You could also ask your health care team about local experts or community resources which help cancer patients and survivors. Some ideas that have helped others find comfort and meaning include:

- Reading uplifting stories about the human spirit
- Praying or meditating
- Taking part in community or social gatherings for support or to offer support to others
- Talking to others who have had a similar experience
- Finding resources at your place of worship
- Grieving for your losses and honoring your experience
- Keeping a journal to write down thoughts about what gives meaning to your life now
- Finding a special place where you find beauty or a sense of calm
- Retreating to spiritual spaces and natural settings in the outdoors that may help with feeling a spiritual sense of peace. Some of these locations are listed below:

LOCAL GARDENS FOR REFLECTION AND MEDITATION:

LA Arboretum

Arcadia, California
arboretum.org

Descanso Gardens

La Canada/Flintridge, California
descansogardens.org/visit

The Huntington Library Botanical Gardens

San Marino, California
huntington.org/gardens

Lake Shrine Temple

Pacific Palisades, California
lakeshrine.org

RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT CITY OF HOPE

If you are having spiritual distress, please talk with your survivorship health care team.

Talking with a social worker may also help. You can reach a social worker by calling the **Division of Clinical Social Work** at **626-218-2282**.

You may also find helpful information, education and support in the Sheri & Les Biller Patient and Family Resource Center. Programs such as support groups, education classes, music therapy, art therapy and more may help you to deal with your feelings. The Sheri & Les Biller Patient and Family Resource Center is located on the Duarte campus in the Main Medical building behind the Guest Services desk or call **626-218-CARE (2273)**.

WHEN SHOULD I ASK FOR A CHAPLAIN?

- If you feel your faith is being challenged
- If you find yourself asking questions such as, “Why is this happening to me?” or “Where is God in all of this?”
- If you have fears or questions about your mortality
- If you feel alone, lonely or afraid
- If you are trying to find meaning in your experience
- If you’re struggling with making decisions
- If you’re experiencing doubts and questions related to your religious or spiritual beliefs
- If you would like prayer or assistance with religious/spiritual rituals or sacraments
- If you would like to see a clergy leader from your own faith tradition

Call Spiritual Care Services at **626-218-3898**.