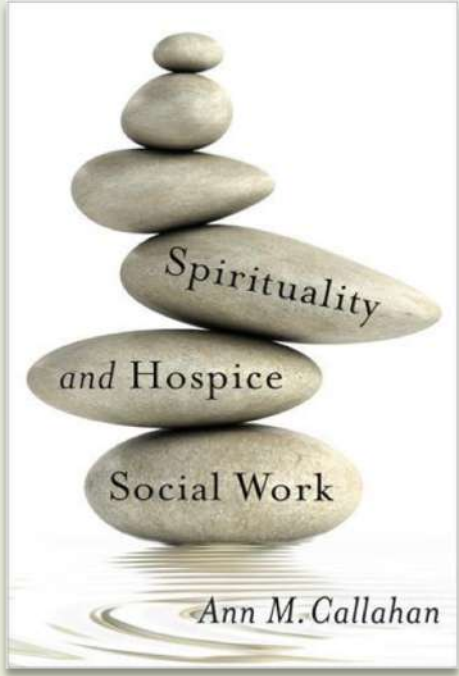


Relational Spirituality: An Opportunity for Social Work in Long-Term Care

Ann M. Callahan, PhD, LCSW

Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky USA

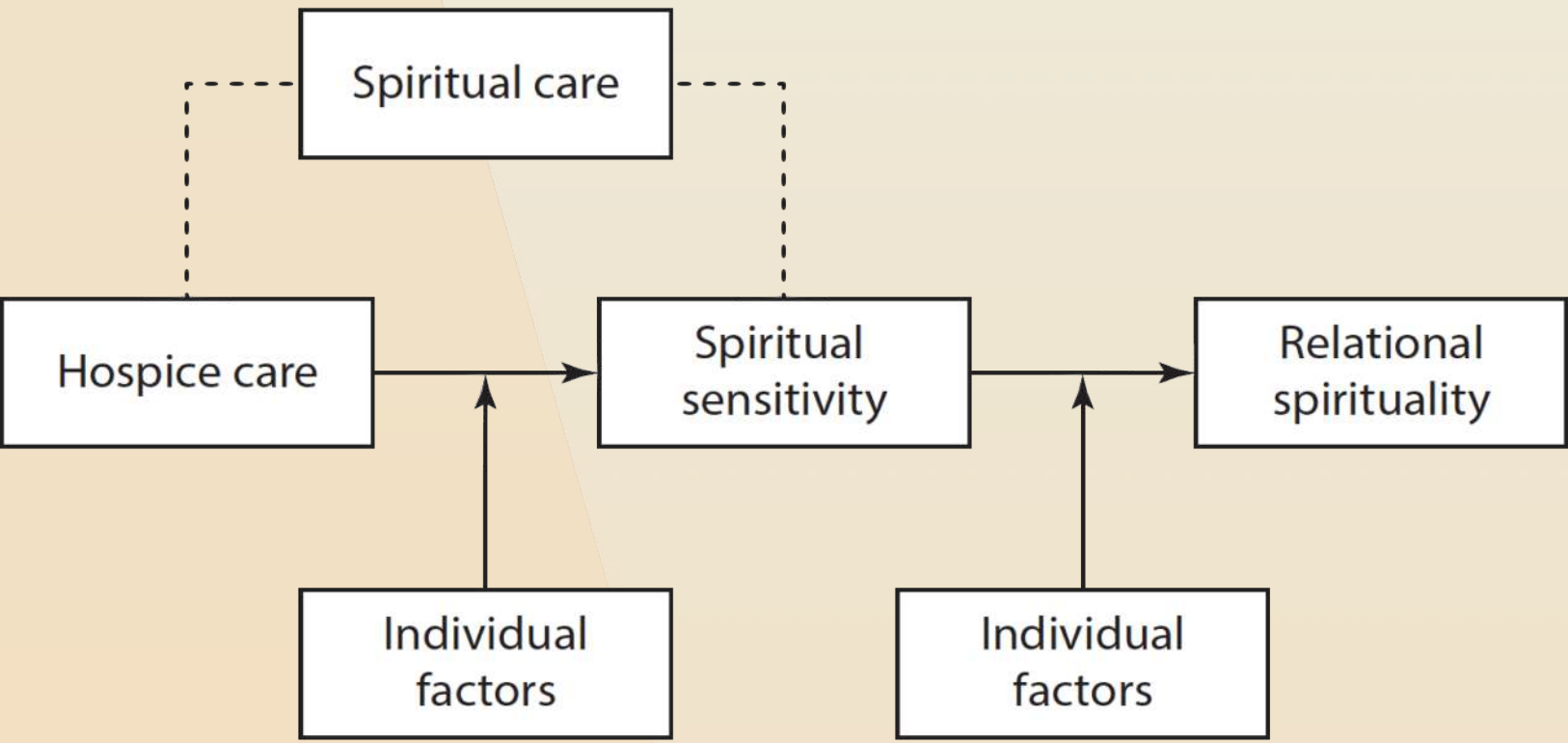


1. Abstract

- Spirituality is a way to recognize life’s meaning and experience connections that facilitate transcendence. This involves the capacity to cultivate meaningful relationships.
- The spiritual value of meaningful relationships is increasingly being recognized, but the operationalization of relational spirituality is varied (Tomlinson, Glenn, Paine, & Sandage, 2016).
- Theory and research suggest that relational spirituality is significantly related to life quality and can help one cope with progressive illness (Counted, Possamai, & Meade, 2018).
- This presentation explores the operationalization of relational spirituality based on the author’s experience as a clinical social worker and research in hospice and palliative care.

2. Relational Model for Spiritually Sensitive Hospice Care (Callahan, 2013)

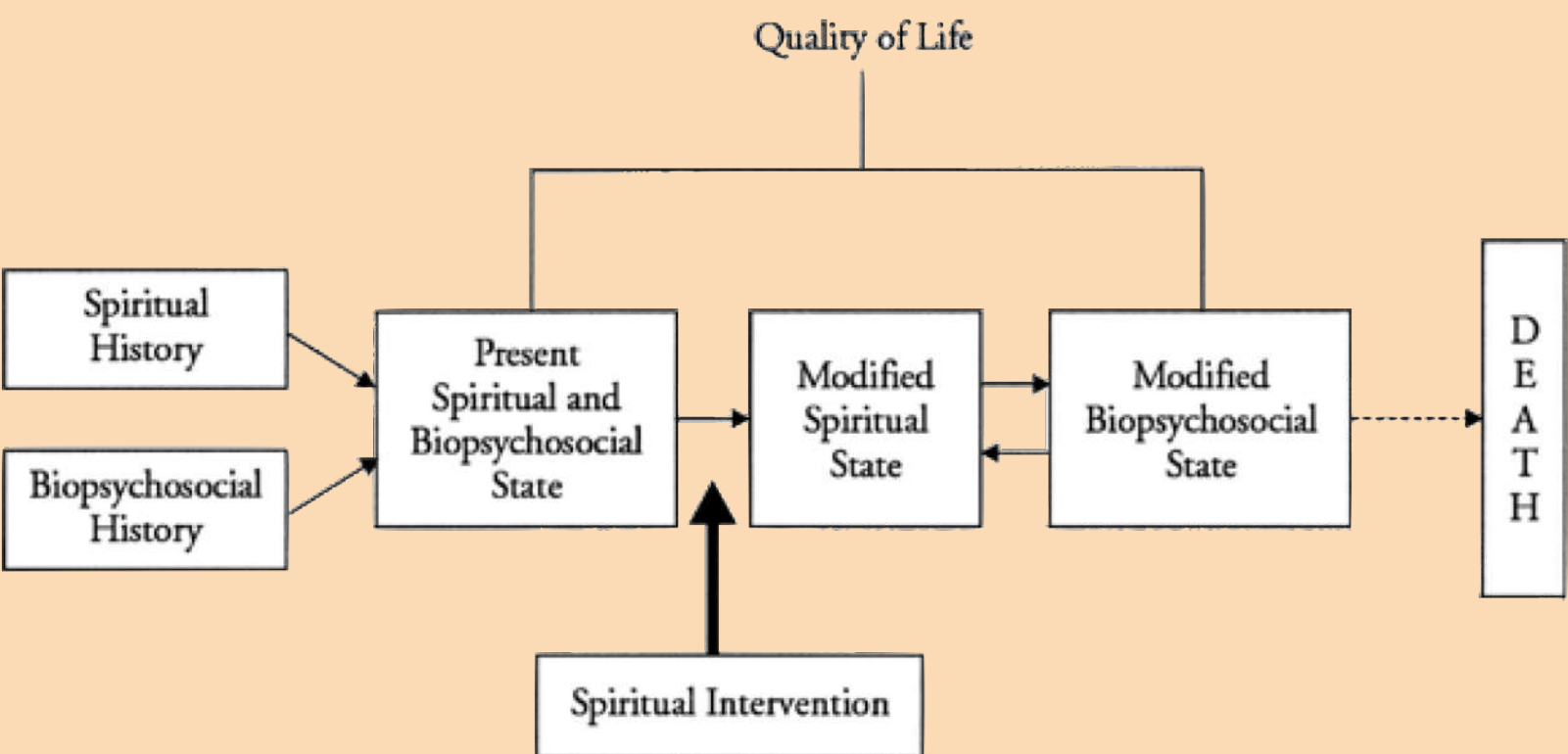
- Originally based on Buber’s (1970) Theory of Dialogue, Callahan (2009) defined spiritually sensitive social work as a social worker’s ability to validate the inherent value and essence of a patient through, for example, “I-thou” communication that is authentic, responsive, and affirming.



- Callahan (2013, 2017a) later expanded on the work of Canda and Furman (1999, 2010) and Faver (2004) to describe spiritually sensitive social work as a style of engagement that can be used throughout the provision of care. Spiritually sensitive social work is believed to create the conditions for relational spirituality.

3. Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model of Care (Sulmasy, 2002)

- Sulmasy (2002) proposed that illness disrupts internal biopsychosocial-spiritual relationships which further disrupts external interpersonal relationships, relationships with the physical environment, and relationships with the transcendent.



- Based on the premise that people are beings-in-relationship, life quality is the product of how internal and external relationships interact. Interventions can be used to resolve relational discord in order to help a client feel whole.

4. Observations

- Clients were referred for intervention when they presented with emotional-behavioral distress. Interventions included cognitive behavioral therapy, problem-solving, psychoeducation, and social support (Kropf & Cummings, 2017).
- Relationships that were meaningful to clients and how these meaningful relationships supported client well-being informed psychotherapeutic intervention.

Micro-Level: Intrapersonal Relationships	
Clients	
Spiritual Coping	Meditate, read inspirational material, focus on affirmations, sing/listen to music, and write/reflect
Religious Coping	Prayer, read religious text, practice religious rituals, seek religious reconciliation, and experience divine forgiveness
Positive Outlook	Think happy thoughts, maintain an open mind, laugh, appreciate the moment, and take one day at a time
Mezzo-Level: Interpersonal Relationships	
Other Clients and Caregivers	
Family and Friends	Outlet for spiritual expression, retain a sense of life meaning, keep from feeling abandoned, facilitate a sense of normalcy
Professionals	Compassionate, empathic, gentleness, trustworthiness, affirming, sense of humor, hopefulness, desire to listen, and empowering
Therapeutic/Support Groups	Reduce depressive symptoms, reduce death-related feelings of meaningless, and increase spiritual well-being
Macro-Level: Transpersonal Relationships	
Nursing Home Setting	
Design Features	Light, gardens, indoor plants, water, paint, windows, furniture, music, space for a gathering area, kitchen to cook, etc.
Access to Support	Rules are flexible for visitors, access to spiritual care providers, ability to remain a part of the larger community, and programming for group work/support
Spiritual/Religious Expression	Places for worship in facility, ability to participate in religious/spiritual rituals/traditions, and access to outside religious/spiritual community

Source: Callahan, 2010; 2017a,b.

- Ways to draw from meaningful relationships also informed treatment goals. Meaningful relationships that were observed occurred across systemic levels (Callahan, 2017a).
- These meaningful relationships, including the therapeutic relationship, emerged and evolved throughout care provision.

5. Conclusions

- Relational spirituality can provide a way to help clinicians recognize how spirituality inspires daily life, while in the process of delivering mental health care.
- Relational spirituality can be operationalized as the experience of meaningful micro- (interpersonal), mezzo- (intrapersonal), and macro-level (transpersonal) relationships.
- Therefore, spiritually sensitive social work can help clients learn to nurture themselves in and through meaningful relationships, including the therapeutic relationship.
- Spiritually sensitive social work involves being sensitive to the spiritual importance of relationships, creating opportunities for clients to explore how relationships give life meaning, and developing interventions to help these relationships grow.

6. Additional Information

References



Ann M. Callahan PhD, LCSW
Eastern Kentucky University
223 Keith Building, 521 Lancaster Avenue
Richmond, KY 40475-3102
office phone: (859) 622-1651
email: ann.callahan@eku.edu
webpage: <http://dranncallahan.info/>

Spirituality and Hospice Social Work (Callahan, 2017a) [Book cover above] further discusses spiritually sensitive social work.