

## **The Missing Competency: Integrating Spiritual Care into Palliative Care for all Members of the Healthcare Team, a Unique Approach**

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### **Abstract:**

Spirituality is increasingly recognized as a core social determinant of health, yet the healthcare field—particularly nursing, dietetics, and palliative care medicine—continues to struggle with integrating spiritual care into practice. While nurses are trained to deliver holistic, patient-centered care, many lack confidence and competence in addressing patients' spiritual needs. They prefer to delegate spiritual care to chaplains. This training gap poses a barrier to achieving personal well-being, pain management and optimal health outcomes, particularly as spiritual distress and unresolved grief are known to increase inflammation, impair glucose regulation, and heighten physical pain.

This session addresses the critical opportunity to embed spiritual care competencies into nursing education and lifestyle medicine training. Building upon evidence from the EPICC Project (Enhancing Nurses' and Midwives' Competence in Providing Spiritual Care through Innovative Education and Compassionate Care), we present a comprehensive framework to develop four key areas of spiritual care competency: intrapersonal spirituality, interpersonal spirituality, assessment and planning, and intervention and evaluation.

Research from Danish hospices and clinical pastoral education and phenomenological action research, practitioners will learn, reflect, care for patients and apply this learning model of spiritual care inside of their palliative care practice. Participants will engage in a multi-modal learning experience that combines didactic content with reflective practice, peer exchange, and clinical application. Using structured tools such as spiritual timelines, clinical verbatims, and small group feedback, learners will explore their own values, emotional responses, and barriers to presence-based care. By fostering practitioner self-awareness and emotional availability, this training not only enhances patient care but also supports practitioner well-being and resilience against burnout.

Evidence underscores the power of spiritual care to reduce distress, physical pain, systemic inflammation, enhance neuroplasticity, and improve patient receptivity to medical care. Participants will leave equipped to recognize signs of spiritual distress, engage in meaningful spiritual dialogue, and offer appropriate interventions or referrals.