

Special Article

The Evolution of Spirituality in the Nursing Literature

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Abstract

This article reviews nursing literature published during the last 50 years with regard to the nursing profession's attitudes towards the religious and spiritual well-being of patients. The literature shows that early writers equated spirituality with religiosity and believed that it was a nurse's duty to intervene religiously in the Catholic faith with a patient to facilitate healing. Over time, the literature progressed to include other faiths. However, there were few guidelines for patients who considered themselves spiritual, but not religious. In the last quarter of the 20th century, a major shift took place in the literature. Spirituality was no longer equated with religiosity, but was seen as a critical component of a holistic approach to healing. The article reviews literature by nurses and others who have conducted spiritual research, developed spiritual assessment tools, and attempted to define spirituality.

Key words: spirituality; religion; meaning; caring; nursing