



ENIGMA

News and Views on mental health

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This newsletter was put together by the staff of the Otago Mental Health Support Trust.

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The opinions and articles expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the Otago Mental Health Support Trust or anyone associated with the organisation

We welcome your feedback on our newsletter. See above for contact details.

Spiritually Speaking...

Spirituality and mental health doesn't seem to be talked about much. In this edition we want to contribute to the discussion through a variety of personal viewpoints. Personally I see spirituality as being about sense of purpose – what gives my life meaning. I guess this is a question everyone faces. In western society we have tended to separate our life into parts for example mental, physical and spiritual. Yet I believe they all have a connection. I find the Te Whare tapa Wha model (see the article 'Te Taha Wairua' below) helpful to explore these connections. So for me my experience of depression (mental distress) was closely linked to my spiritual health (sense of hopelessness and no purpose) which then influenced my relationships and my physical health. A special thanks to all the contributors to this edition.

- Grant Cooper - Editor

Te Taha Wairua – The Spiritual Dimension

The whare tapa whā model of health likens four dimensions of health to walls of a whare (house): taha tīnana (physical), taha hinengaro (mental), taha whānau (family) and taha wairua (spiritual). In this article I will be unravelling some misconceptions about how spiritual health may be perceived. Many people may understand spirituality to be faith and having a relationship with a religion or a supernatural power although this may strengthen ones capacity for spirituality. Health in a spiritual sense is about maintaining healthy communication with others and having a sense of belonging.

While there are aspects that may be more associated with one "taha" of the whare hauora, such as taha tinana, the injuries one may sustain will not only affect their physical health but it will have repercussions to follow upon the taha whānau, taha hinengaro and taha wairua. The injury may hinder your role in supporting your whānau, thus your taha whānau is damaged. The injury may hinder your role in communication with others and maintaining a conviction for life, thus your taha wairua is damaged. Your injury may have an impact on your mentality sending you into a confused, frustrated or a saddened state of mind, thus your taha hinengaro is damaged. This works vice versa, therefore when one wall has become damaged, the other walls of the whare are also weakened.

"Hauora Māori" doesn't mean health for Māori: it isn't exclusive. Māori means natural, thus hauora Māori is simply natural health. When thinking about hauora Māori, in an holistic sense, it is important to think about the dimensions as intertwining for we exist in this universe where we perceive a three dimensional world. Those three dimensions are very difficult to separate into each dimension because they're all existing simultaneously.

Tyrin Hāmuera and Francis Bradley

Starting the conversation...

It seems sometimes that we don't know how to speak about the most subtle aspects of ourselves, the stuff beyond our personalities and beyond our illness. Yet it is from this inner quiet space that we often fuel our lives with hope and purpose. The best word that we have for this is spirituality. Yet is it? It seems that we each experience and define this word differently. Some cultures are comfortable with this aspect of themselves and others are not. Perhaps in this context it is useful to see what researchers are saying about spirituality.

Recently in the field of health science, researchers conducted a meta-review of ordinary peoples' experience of spirituality. People described their experience of spirituality as beyond religion. It can also be part of religion. They described: i) an inner existential awareness, ii) connection, iii) energy or power, and iv) transcendental experience (Chui et al., 2004). Schmidt-Wilk (2000) extended this definition by suggesting categories of 'applied spirituality' and 'pure spirituality'. Pure spirituality was a: "silent, unbounded, inner experience of pure awareness" (Heaton et al., 2004, p.63). Time appreciating nature can often give glimpses of this silent inner perspective. Applied spirituality referred to the practical applications and measurable outcomes that arose from the inner experience (Heaton et al., 2004 p.63). This may be the way we choose to care and share with other members of our community.

De Jager Meezenbroek, Garsen, van den Berg, van Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, (2012) reviewed various spirituality questionnaires, as tools for measuring spirituality as a universal human experience. They found that current questionnaires were inadequate for identifying a comprehensive understanding of the role of spirituality as a universal human experience. Particularly as questions tended to be about specific belief systems or religiosity. As a result of this they offer this definition; "In view of this, we have defined spirituality as one's striving for and experience of connection with oneself, connectedness with others and nature and connectedness with the transcended"(de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2012, p.338). Spirituality is an important aspect of wellness. It is one aspect of rebuilding mental health and resilience. It is particularly wonderful as we get to define that according to our own experience and what resonates with our own inner heart. Which is of course the start of another conversation....

Dr Janine Joyce, Social Worker, Community Day Programme

Spirituality and Mental Health

Hello! My name is Keong Hoh and I work as a psychiatric registrar at Dunedin Hospital. I am an active member of the Hare Krishna faith and this forms an important part of my life, and would like to share some perspectives on this.

I am greatly encouraged that the science of psychiatry is coming of age and embracing unfamiliar concepts such as mindfulness, various forms of yoga, non-violence and vegetarianism.

The world moves in certain mysterious and mystical worlds according to its own rhythm, unencumbered by modern man. My teacher Srila Prabhupada, the Founder Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) says that disease is caused by three things, namely irregular habits, overeating and uncleanliness. He coined the term 'simple living and high thinking' which will return man to a more harmonious relationship with Mother Nature, which is another manifestation of the Divinity of the Supreme Lord.

Thus what appears to be missing is a spiritual perspective on life. A careful observation will show that there is in fact no lacking of anything in Mother Nature, for example every creature down to ant has its allotted food provided by the Lord. Unfortunately since the start of the Industrial Revolution, man has learned to focus on the external world, on what he can extract out of and use for his enjoyment. This sets him at profound imbalance, for the world was created by the Lord in order to facilitate human beings to return to a higher state of consciousness, whereby he realizes the temporary nature of this world and starts to question his existence.

There is a divine existence just thinly veiled behind our everyday life and Srila Prabhupada teaches us that the simplest way to reach that is to chant the Supreme Lord's Holy Names Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. Recognizing the short distractions of the present age, the Lord has made the way to approach Him supremely easy, and that the chanting of the Holy Names is the prescribed way to approach Him. We can see every bona fide religion stating the same truth, for example in the Bible, it says 'For whosoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.' In this way, man can live happily in this world and transfer his consciousness into spiritual matters and go back Home, back to live with the Lord when he leaves his body behind at death. There is no need to stop anything and retire to meditate, simply add chanting the Names of the Lord to your life and your life will be sublime.

Hare Krishna!

One Woman's Story

Due to a combination of overwhelming circumstances of which I believed I had no power to change, and in the depths of wanting to end my life, something from deep inside me cried out NO!! I believe this was my spirit, the energy force from which I live my life, the me who enjoys life which has meaning and hope, who can accept the ups and downs, who doesn't judge and is open to experience and learning.

Professor Dirk De Ridder Neurological Foundation professor and neurosurgeon at the University of Otago writes that the human brain contains the circuits that process how we see ourselves and the world around us. It is the source of concepts humans hold, above all others – our morality, our sense of self, and our sense of God or lack thereof. "By studying the brain and seeing how it adapts to the environment, it has taught me that there is nothing which is absolute, nothing which is dogmatic, that everything is just depending on how the environment changes, and that's the only thing your brain picks up, changes in the environment."

When my mind becomes 'boss' and I experience mental unwellness, I lose all sense of connection to myself, others and to what I call God. This is a pattern that began in my childhood through abusive experiences. Yet each time I have had to face a fear, or multiple fears, prior to and during a depression, I discover an underlying truth, and the mental belief, fear or prejudice disappears. This has enabled me to grow in my ability to care for and respect myself and others more and more deeply. I no longer feel empty, a nothing, a nobody.

Some people consider the spirit world (where people go after death, and where our ancestors are waiting) to be what Spirituality is. For me, this is an aspect of an even bigger picture (and experience) of which we are all capable. Some would say, an experience we are all in the midst of, yet unaware of it.

We live in communities and cultures full of rules and concepts and closed minds, so to have these feelings and images of a 'spiritual realm' is often classified as 'crazy'; so many of us are left to try and make sense of it all often alone and frightened and feeling different.

Let us hope that what appears to be some kind of innate fear of what truly exists inside each of us beyond the physical body, beyond the conditioned thinking that the rational mind dictates what reality is, and beyond the confines of judgement, continues to be explored, experienced and creative.

Jilly McCulloch

PS I affiliate to no religion, cult, spiritual organisation or doctrine.

"Spirituality and Mental Health" ~ one Pāsifika perspective

Faafetai tele lava mo le avanoa. Thank You very much for the opportunity. Thank you Grant for offering me a chance to make what can only be a tentative and brief foray.

As I write this, I am sitting in a "whānau room" of the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit, on the ground floor of the Christchurch Hospital. With me are my younger brother, a sister-in-law, two nieces, two nephews, and two dear friends. One of the nieces and one of the nephews are playing a game of chess. A nephew is speaking with his aunty about his university classes and the NCEA system. There are many more of us in the city or in transit, on their way from Ōtepoti/Dunedin. We are all here in support of a sister who is a donor (of stem cells) for our brother who was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia in March. That transplant is happening today. Why am I writing about leukaemia in an article about mental health and spirituality?

Firstly, while the Ivala-Laufiso ancestries are from Sāmoa and Tonga, within our very large extended family (aiga) – the second and third generations carry bloodlines from Ngāti Awa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou as well as China, Scotland, France, Tokelau and Tonga. My point is from a Polynesian perspective mental health, spiritual health and familial health are inseparable.

Prior to this morning's medical process proper, which started in what's called the Apheresis Day Unit, we gathered in the whānau room for karakia (prayer). And of course, as with many whānau and aiga of Tāngata whenua and Taiuiwi (those of us who are not Māori), this karakia was not the first of the day. Members of our aiga have been offering karakia from Hamilton, Auckland and Ōtepoti since the early hours of the morning. Yesterday four of us were deeply privileged to visit with a local kaumātua who gifted us with pounamu for our brother and sister. I had a brief sense of how the lives of the ancients were shaped by karakia. So this brought home to me, a New Zealand-born Sāmoan, how disconnected our twenty-first century living is from real life, from the earth's natural rhythms.

From talking with my sister-in-law who teaches adults about brain development in babies and children: "mental health" is a misnomer. From a Māori perspective, the spectrum of well-being is focused on spiritual connectedness and "spiritual blindness".

Marie Laufiso

Interview with Dale Smart – Holistic Therapist

How do you define spirituality?

Spirituality to me is the fundamentals which make my life pleasant to live, the morals and beliefs that serve purpose and make me feel good as a whole. To me my spirituality has formed through the things I have encountered in my life and after sitting back and reassessing how all these things that have happened have served a purpose I have accepted that they have made me who I am today.

How do you think spirituality relates to mental health?

I think that spirituality relates hugely to mental health. I have found personally that living without a sense of your own spirituality and purpose in life tends to set your whole being out of balance. When I found spiritual practices that resonated well with me, things such as depression and anxiety was soon easy to understand and deal with and later disappeared completely

Describe how spirituality makes a positive difference to your mental health?

I am now able to better understand my own needs in life, and when I am feeling down and low I am able to choose a spiritual Practice I follow to make myself feel better. Now that I have a good spiritual foundation in my life, everything seems much more positive, I can now see reason in most things and when I don't I now know how I can find it. And I have found patience and perseverance is key!

What do you think mental health providers could do to include a spiritual perspective to mental health?

Research and find alternative therapies to offer to their clients. Things such as Massage, Reiki, Essential oils, Belief work, Art therapy, Reflexology, Alternative medicines(just to name a few) are hugely beneficial to the person as a whole and helps hugely to better understand yourself.

Our NEW

“Recreation in Dunedin - \$5 and under” book will be available in late July. Contact us then to get your FREE copy.



Women's Group is held on the last Friday of every month. This is a friendly informal meeting giving an opportunity for women to make new friends, and share experiences.

1-3pm meet at our rooms, Queens Building, 109 Princes Street.

(Image borrowed from Awakening 360 Women's Group)

We wish to thank the following for financial support:

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