



Taking a “Patient Centered” Spiritual Assessment

The FICA Spiritual History Tool® was developed at the George Washington (GW) Institute for Spirituality and Health by Dr. Puchalski and a group of primary care physicians to help physicians and other healthcare professionals address spiritual issues with patients.

They recommend spiritual histories / assessments be taken as part of the regular history during an annual exam or new patient visit, but can also be taken as part of follow-up visits, as appropriate.

The FICA tool serves as a guide for conversations in the clinical setting. The acronym FICA can help structure questions in taking a brief spiritual history by healthcare professionals.

F - Faith and Belief

“Do you consider yourself spiritual or religious?” or “Do you have spiritual beliefs that help you cope with stress?” If the patient responds “No,” the health care provider might ask, “What gives your life meaning?” Sometimes patients respond with answers such as family, career, or nature.

I - Importance

“What importance does your faith or belief have in our life? Have your beliefs influenced how you take care of yourself in this illness? What role do your beliefs play in regaining your health?”

C - Community

“Are you part of a spiritual or religious community? Is this of support to you and how? Is there a group of people you really love or who are important to you?” Communities such as churches, temples, and mosques, or a group of like-minded friends can serve as strong support systems for some patients.

A - Address in Care

“How would you like me, your healthcare provider, to address these issues in your healthcare?”

As with any other part of the patient interview, the spiritual histories should be patient-centered. Thus, the tool is meant to create an environment of trust by indicating to the patient that the physician or other healthcare professional is open to listening to the patient about his or her spiritual issues, if the patient wants to talk about those issues.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR TAKING A “PATIENT-CENTERED” SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT

There are ethical guidelines to which the physician or healthcare provider should adhere when taking a spiritual history. Healthcare professionals are encouraged not to use the FICA tool as a checklist, but rather to rely on it as a guide to aid and open the discussion to spiritual issues.

It is recommended the following guidelines be used for healthcare providers taking a patient's spiritual history:

- Consider spirituality as a potentiality important component of every patient's physical well-being and mental health.
- Address spirituality at each complete physical examination and continue addressing it at follow-up visits if appropriate. In patient care, spirituality is an ongoing issue.
- Respect a patient's privacy regarding spiritual beliefs; don't impose your beliefs on others.
- Make referrals to chaplains, spiritual directors, or community resources as appropriate.
- Be aware that your own spiritual beliefs will help you personally and will overflow in your encounters with those for whom you care to make the doctor-patient encounter a more humanistic one.