Symposium „Spirituality and Health: reviewing the evidence and their clinical implications”

23.09.2013, 15-17 Uhr, Gesellschaftsraum (Zahn 7) der Uniklinik RWTH Aachen

Prof. Alexander Moreira-Almeida, MD, PhD obtained a medical degree at Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) and was trained in psychiatry and cognitive-behavioral therapy at the Institute of Psychiatry of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, where he also obtained his PhD in Health Sciences. Formerly a postdoctoral fellow in religion and health at Duke University, he is now Professor of Psychiatry at UFJF’s School of Medicine and Founder and Co-Director of the Research Center in Spirituality and Health, Brazil (www.ufjf.br/nupes-eng). He was Vice-Dean of Graduate studies at UFJF. His main research interests involve the exploration of the association between religiosity and health, empirical studies of spiritual experiences as well as the methodology, history and epistemology of this research. Most of his publications are available at www.hoje.org.br/elsh

Abstract: Religiosity and spirituality (R/S) have become a topic of growing interest among clinicians and health researchers. This talk presents a brief and practical review of key concepts in R/S as well as the main evidence on the impact of R/S on mental health. Two recent reviews found more than 3,300 empirical studies on the relevance and impact of R/S on health. Studies show that R/S is an important element in the lives of most of the world population, especially among those facing struggles like illness. People with higher levels of R/S tend to have higher wellbeing and lower levels of depression, substance abuse/dependence, and suicidal behaviors. Although requiring further study, R/S is an aspect in the lives of patients with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, with evidence suggesting a beneficial impact of R/S on the evolution of these mental disorders. Negative impacts of R/S on health will also be discussed. Currently, the research trend is no longer to investigate whether there are relationships between R/S and health, but in identifying the mechanisms of this relationship and how to apply this knowledge in clinical practice.

Peter J. Verhagen, MD obtained a medical and theological degree at University of Utrecht and was trained in psychiatry and psychotherapy at the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Utrecht, Netherlands. He is co-founder (secretary) and current chair of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry (www.religionandpsychiatry.com), and secretary of the Dutch Foundation for Psychiatry and Religion. He is the leading editor of a WPA Handbook on Religion and Psychiatry (Verhagen et al., 2010) and a Dutch Handbook on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry (Verhagen & Van Megen, 2012).

Abstract: Looking at the maps of the European Values Study (www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu) one can clearly see that religion and spirituality play a valuable role in the lives of many, many people in Europe and worldwide. It has also become evident that religion and spirituality do play a non-negligible role in the etiology of mental disorders, have the potential to influence the course of mental illness both in a positive and negative way, and have potential benefit within treatment. Therefore it is recommendable to consider religion and spirituality within clinical assessment and treatment planning. In fact it is absolutely necessary that psychiatrists are sensitive and always respect the religious and spiritual beliefs and
practices of their patients, their families and carers. This also implies that a sensitive assessment of the patients’ religion and spirituality should be considered routinely. The standard assessment tool for the outline for Cultural Formulation and culturally relevant information according to DSM-5 might be helpful. Other ‘instruments’ are available and will be discussed.