



European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

Newsletter January 2006

Editorial

Dear colleagues, Dear friends,

We are happy to present you the first Newsletter of the European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health. The research workshop with Prof. Harold Koenig (from the Duke University, NC/USA) in September this year in Langenthal (Switzerland) encouraged us to start this European Network and to gather European researchers in the field.

Since September we learned of at least another ten persons actively involved in research on religion, spirituality and health in Europe. So we realize that there is quite a number of small groups or single persons dealing with the topic. It would be of great value to get to know one another and to find ways of scientific exchange or even common projects. So we decided to start the European Network and make it a major focus of our Institute.

A Newsletter is thought to be the best platform to exchange information on recent activities, research groups and research results, as well as bring up needs and announcements. Everybody is invited to use this platform and to participate in it. Let's build a European Research Network for Religion, Spirituality and Health together!

René Hefsti, M.D.

News

„What is healing us?“ – Faith as a way to health

A conference of the Catholic Academy in Freiburg dealt with this question on 14th and 15th October 2005. Dr. med. Eckehard Frick SJ (Psychooncology at the University-hospital of Munich) argued for a holistic

understanding of wellbeing. A person, even facing an incurable disease could from a religious and existential perspective be healed. At the Universityhospital of Munich he and his team are conducting a survey looking at the spiritual histories of the patients in order to better care for their overall health needs, including their religious needs.

Prof. Dr. theol. Dieter Korsch (Phillips University Marburg) supports the thesis that medical treatment always has a religious dimension. Dr. phil. Monika Renz (Psychooncology of the Canton-Hospital St. Gallen) emphasized the importance of spiritual experiences. 135 out of 251 patients, who were assigned to her project had a spiritual experience in the context of their disease or shortly before they died. For her, spirituality is what is able to transcend the limits of the self.

The papers of the conference will be published. Contact: verena.wetzstein@katholische-akademie-freiburg.de.

Spirituality, illness and healing

A conference at the Ita-Wegmann-Hospital in Arlesheim (Switzerland) took place from the 28th to 29th October 2005. It discussed different spiritual approaches from Christian, Buddhist and Anthroposophical point of views. These approaches were discussed in terms of their meaning for medical and therapeutic practice. During significant events in life many people become conscious about their primeval longing for transcendence. A reduced biophysical paradigm in medicine does not fulfil the spiritual needs of these patients.

Prof. Dr. med. Peter Mathiessen (University of Witten/Herdeke), PD Dr. med. Arndt Büssing (University of Witten/Herdeke) and Dr. med. Michaela Glöcker (Ita-Wegmann-Hospital) led the conference. The contributions of the conference will be published. Contact: arndt.buessing@uniwh.de.

Integrating Spirituality into Medicine: Ethical Issues and Practical Tools.

A lecture held by Christina Puchalski, M.D., Ph.D., Founder and Director of the George Washington Institute (www.gwish.org) on November 16, 2005, at the University Hospital Berne as a cooperation of the University of Berne, Kollegiale Instanz für Komplementärmedizin KIKOM, (www.kikom.unibe.ch), represented by Dr. med. Peter Heusser and the Research Institute for Spirituality and Health, Langenthal (www.rish.ch) represented by Dr. med. René Hefsti, as well as Dr. med. Marie-Louise Gander, (mlglander@swissonline.ch).

Dr. Christina Puchalski emphasized the importance of integrating the topic of spirituality into the education of medical students. In the last few years there has been a great increase of courses about spirituality in medical schools in the US. Students become aware of the patients' need for spirituality. They also learn how to talk about this topic with their patients. Dr. Puchalski showed that patients felt taken more seriously and they perceived their doctor or therapist as more humane when they spoke about spirituality with their patients.

Franz Fischer

Topic

Religion and Schizophrenia

Religion (including both spirituality and religiousness) is salient in the lives of many people suffering from schizophrenia. However, psychiatric research rarely addresses religious issues, particularly in term of religious coping. In many patients' life stories, religion plays a central role in the processes of reconstructing a sense of self and re-

covery. However religion may become part of the problem as well as part of the recovery. Some patients are helped by their faith community, uplifted by spiritual activities, comforted and strengthened by their beliefs. Other patients are rejected by their faith community, burdened by spiritual activities, disappointed and demoralized by their beliefs. Religion is relevant for the treatment of people with schizophrenia in that it may help to reduce pathology, to enhance coping and to foster recovery.

Facing this context, our group is currently studying religious coping in patients with schizophrenia. We began a collaboration between the Department of psychiatry of the Hospital of Geneva (Dr. Philippe Huguelet with Sylvia Mohr and Dr. Laurence Borrás), The Faculty of Theology of Lausanne and Geneva (Prof. Pierre-Yves Brandt) and the Faculty of Psychology of Geneva (Prof. Christiane Gilliéron).

One hundred-fifteen patients, all followed in public psychiatric outpatient facilities in Geneva, Switzerland for a diagnosis of nonaffective psychosis, were included in our first study. Interviews were conducted using a semistructured interview that we developed about spirituality and religious coping. Clinicians were asked about their own beliefs and religious activities as well as their patients' religious and clinical characteristics.

Sixteen patients presented positive psychotic symptoms reflecting aspects of their religious beliefs. A majority of the patients reported that religion was an important aspect of their lives (mostly by practicing alone), but only 36% of them had confronted this topic with their clinicians. Fewer clinicians were religiously involved, and, in half of the cases, their perceptions of patients' religious involvement were inaccurate.

Several reasons may explain the salience of religion in patients' lives. Facing the illness and its social consequences, more than half of patients rely on religious resources to cope (54%). Others turn to religion in order to be healed (5%). Positive psychotic symptoms increase the salience of religion by themselves (26%). Patients who experi-

enced delusion or hallucination with religious content in the past explained how it increased religion as a way to cope (11%).

Also, we are currently assessing in this cohort how religion interacts with substance abuse and suicidal risk. For this latter topic, another group of 30 patients having committed suicide but without suffering from a psychotic illness has been investigated in order to get a comparison with patients with schizophrenia.

These first results are currently being published. We want to go further in evaluating the outcome of the patients included in this study. We also want to ask patients if (and how) they want to get help for their spiritual needs. Finally, the effect of spiritual assessment will be evaluated.

Philippe Huguelet, M.D., Ph.D.

Forum

Here you have the opportunity to deliver information, resources, requests or open questions.

Constantin Klein from the University of Leipzig, Department of Psychology, kindly sent an comprehensive guide to statistical tests. You will find the pdf-document on our homepage (www.rish.ch).

Announcements and events

La variété des fonctions psychologiques du religieux. 100 ans après la traduction des Varieties de William James

May 12-13, 2006

University Lausanne.

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New Publications

- The relationship between religion/spirituality and physical health, mental health, and pain in a chronic pain population, A.E. Rippentrop, Pain 116, 2005.
- Psychosis or Faith? Clinicians assessment of religious beliefs, S. O'Connor and B. Vandenberg, Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, Vol. 73, 2005.
- Religious involvement and 6-year course of depressive symptoms in older Dutch citizens: results from the longitudinal aging study Amsterdam, A.W. Braam, Journal of Aging and Health, Vol. 16, 2004.

Impressum

This Newsletter will be published quarterly by the Research Institute of Spirituality and Health, Langenthal, Switzerland.

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