

caregivers, friends, and health and mental health care professionals as they try to help the patient. From the unsettling moments of receiving an initial diagnosis to the lengthy wandering through today's high tech medical labyrinth, patients experience a host of vulnerable emotions, confusion, and isolation that can depress their spirits. It becomes a daily challenge to sustain one's spirits and preserve identity in the midst of illness. Exploring how spirituality can be a resource in illness situations is a useful pursuit. Helping patients create a down-to-earth spiritual toolbox can strengthen their perceived coping and renew their spirits. Having a repertoire of practices that soothe, distract, and inspire can counter anxiety and pain, while actively using the tools stimulates patients in their own healing. While spiritual tools do not cure illness, they can sustain patients' spirits to persist in coping efforts. The author introduces a "Healing" Pillow as one of many coping tools in a repertoire of resources for patients. The pillow has aesthetic images, inspirational words, and the special quality of touch to comfort the patient. Following a description of the concept and origin of the pillow, the author shares brief vignettes from her own experience to illustrate the impact of the pillow on patients and their families. In addition, sources for readings to accompany the pillow are suggested.

Key words: Spirituality, religion, coping tools, touch, social support

INTRODUCTION

Illness plays no favorites in attacking people of all races, creeds, socioeconomic and cultural groups, and its ripple effects entangle patients, family members, caregivers, friends, and the professionals who care for them. Over 130 million people in America face chronic illness (Jackson, 2009). Millions struggle with injury and loss, as well as the over 45,000 returning troops plagued with continuing physical wounds and emotional trauma (Institute of Medicine, 2013). Over 65 million Americans provide care to elderly, disabled, and chronically ill family members (Margolis, 2013). A sudden diagnosis of illness creates vulnerability, confusion, and isolation, generating a range of difficult emotions and spiritual questions. Patients are thrown off balance and forced to follow a detour off their life path into the complex high tech medical system, which may feel like wandering

(Meyerstein, 2014) containing a wide repertoire of resources from Patients can benefit from a "down-to-earth spiritual toolbox" varied traditions such as complementary and alternative medicine (acupuncture, homeopathy, massage, yoga), creative expression (art, humor, journaling, music, poetry), inspirational wisdom, meditative approaches (mindfulness and guided imagery), nature, Psalms, prayer, ritual, stories and texts, and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). Cultural differences may be a factor in influencing patients' preferences regarding spiritual care and tools (Schultz et al., 2014). Even people who don't consider themselves religious may find spiritual inspiration through pathways such as nature, creative expression, meditation, or music. The Healing Pillow is k

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words, "*El na refa na la*" inscribed in Hebrew. These words mean "please, God, heal her please," and come from the very first personal prayer in the Hebrew Bible. When Moses' sister Miriam fell ill, he cried out these words on her behalf. I also gazed at

or flowers. It was practical, and besides helping me, you are helping others. I will try to do the same when I get better. Moreover, the pillow gave me physical comfort through back support and helped me on my road to “*refuah shelaymah*” (full healing of body and spirit).

SUMMARY

Comfort is a universal need, not just during illness. It is important for healing in many situations, including injury, loss, trauma, and