

DISCUSSING RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN PRIMARY CARE

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Generally, there is a distinction between:

Spirituality—one’s personal sense of connection with the divine
or the ultimate or, specifically, God, and

Religion—one’s personal participation in a specific set of beliefs,
actions, rituals, attitudes and ethics.

The following questions are intended to be respectful of this distinction,
while also attempting to find out “what matters” for the patient:

What are the issues and concerns that are helpful for the clinician
to know for making medical decisions and/or recommendations?

--Do you have a religious background? (A question about the past)

--Do you practice a particular faith? (A question about the present)

--Are you a spiritual person? (A question about the present)

(“No” to *ALL* three questions: Perhaps go to <Optional or Finally below.)

(“Yes” to *ANY* of the three questions: Continue.)

--How is your faith a resource for you for living life?

--Is there a particular aspect of your spiritual experience, belief or practice that has
special meaning for you?

(If “Yes,” *How* is it meaningful?)

--How does your faith guide you or help you in decision-making?

--What, particularly, do I need to know to be sensitive to your personal faith needs?

<Optional: I am a . . . (Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, other)>

Finally: (This section may be inserted at any point in the above sequencing.)

--Please tell me if I say or do anything that bothers you or offends you religiously.

--If you have any concerns or questions, please ask me.

--I want to learn from you, and I only want to be of help.

These questions are in a more or less sequential form. The questions may be
expanded or omitted as required by the person and/or the context.

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