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## Prayer as an Intervention in Suffering with Late Stage Dementia

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## **Research and Creative Experience for Undergraduates (RCEU) Faculty Proposal**

### **Prayer as an Intervention in Suffering with Late Stage Dementia**

#### **Faculty/Research Mentor**

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#### **Project Overview**

Background and Purpose – There are over 5 million people in the US with some form of dementia. When in the late stages of the disease, those affected with dementia are unable to verbalize whether they are suffering in any realm, physical to spiritual and providers find it difficult to assess suffering in individuals who are have no purposive language. Caregivers perceive their loved ones as suffering by body language and facial expressions as well as experience and knowledge of having known the individual for a long period of time, but spiritual suffering is difficult for the caregivers to assess in their loved ones.

The nursing profession originated from a spiritual and religious tradition where spirituality was noted to be an essential part of nursing practice. Nursing today is taught from a holistic perspective, meaning that the whole person is treated rather than the disease or only specific areas. The spiritual needs of patients are often ignored due to numerous factors, such as a lack of spiritual focus during training, a lack of confidence from the nurse in discussing spiritual issues, or a lack of time. However, prayer has been shown to be associated with positive wellbeing in an individual and has even been shown to improve outcomes with hospitalized patients. In one study, prayer was one of the most commonly used therapies by women with breast cancer.

The research question proposed for this experimental study is: Can praying by a caregiver decrease signs or symptoms of suffering in people with late stage dementia who have a strong spiritual background and who have no ability to verbalize suffering? The aims for the study are: 1)to identify if prayer is a reliable intervention to decrease suffering, especially spiritual suffering, in those with LSD; 2)to strengthen nursing holistic practice; and 3)to increase the caregiver's role in decreasing suffering in their loved one. Using an experimental group, caregivers will be asked to pray when they feel their loved one is suffering. An instrument will be developed to assess whether caregivers felt the prayer session helps their loved one and focus groups will be used to validate and elaborate on the instrument results. This project may be of interest to psychology students as well as nursing students.

#### **Student Duties**

Using an interdisciplinary team approach, the undergraduate student will work in collaboration with Dr. Smith to develop new nursing science. Protocols for the study will develop from a thorough literature review of prayer as an intervention, which will be conducted by the student. The student will be given opportunities to work with patients with late stage dementia as well as the

caregivers in order to learn how to integrate holistic practices into their nursing practice, specifically spiritual issues that may be lacking in the classroom or other traditional clinical arenas. The student will learn how to conduct focus groups and discuss prayer sessions with caregivers and then conduct these focus groups to elicit more information than is provided with the instrument. As a result of this study, the student will develop an abstract to be submitted to the Southern Nurses Research Society in the fall of 2015 with possible presentation via podium or poster. Another outcome is the possibility of manuscript submission. Learning outcomes are as follows:

By the end of the summer semester 2015, the student will

1. Conduct a literature review on prayer as an intervention;
2. Be able to develop focus group questions, conduct focus group interviews, and analyze data from the interviews;
3. Disseminate results and demonstrate acquired knowledge via conference presentations; and
4. Integrate spirituality and holistic practices into their nursing practice.

#### **Mentor Supervision and Interaction**

Weekly meetings will be scheduled with Dr. Smith to complete the literature review, develop focus group questions and how to conduct focus group interviews, and to analyze the data from the focus groups. Mentorship and leadership to assist the student in meeting the objectives and goals of this proposal will be provided by Dr. Smith in the weekly meetings as well as via emails at regular intervals. Dr. Smith will travel to study sites to evaluate how the student is progressing with the focus groups. This study allows the chosen student to develop skills in collaboration, developing and leading focus group interviews, learning how to integrate holistic care in their nursing practice, and how to disseminate the findings of research to the scientific community.