

Spirituality and health — a course offering

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I recently had the pleasure to sit with Karen Scott Barss, a faculty member in the Nursing Division of SIAST, and an adjunct professor of the University of Regina, College of Nursing. Within a few minutes, I knew I had found a kindred spirit, and someone who spoke the same “language.”

I typically spend my days thinking about how spirituality and health care come together, but I don’t often find others who actually understand my “elevator speech” when they ask what I do for a living.

The impetus for this meeting was to learn more about a new course — Spirituality and Health — offered through the Saskatchewan collaborative bachelor of science in nursing. This course is a first of its kind in

Saskatchewan, and was recently held from May 7 to June 14, 2013. It is an online course that brings together groups of individuals (10 per group, to a maximum of four groups) in a virtual setting that, through a variety of contemplative learning activities, deepen their ability to

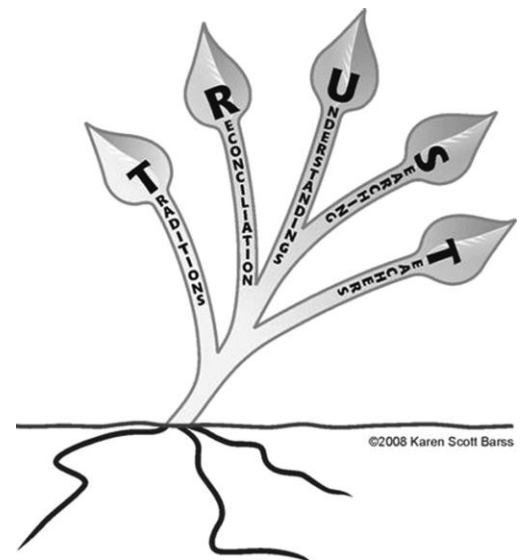
address spiritual needs within themselves, their clients and their workplaces. These “journey groups” act as peer mentorship groups, and near the end of the five-week course, they come together with their facilitator for a two-day retreat.

“Respecting others’ views doesn’t mean we can’t talk about them,” states Barss. In terms of religion, there are unique worldviews, but there are also universal spiritual needs. Touching on hope, meaning and purpose — and honouring roots and religious traditions — creates authenticity in understanding who a person is, and what feeds their spirit.

“Healing happens in a place of trust or restored trust,” Barss continues, “to neglect a person’s spirituality, or to approach it intrusively, places an individual at risk of experiencing a thwarted healing process.”

From this understanding, Barss has developed the TRUST model, a non-linear acronym that typifies the five domains on this affirming, inclusive model for spiritual care. The domains are traditions, reconciliation, understandings, searching and teachers. Each of these areas is aptly defined, with corresponding assessment questions that allow caregivers a tool to reinforce and mobilize their interpersonal and communication skills.

The course defines a list of grounding assumptions, which includes the competence of the nurse/caregiver to create and sustain therapeutic relationships, and assist clients to identify and pursue their health goals in an empowering manner.



Further to this is the notion that they also promote trusting, collegial relationships with those they mentor. This course is about helping caregivers find the language that will help them bridge their professional mandate to the holistic nature of, and specifically the spiritual nature of, their clients and patients. It also provides them with the understanding of when it's time to refer to specialized spiritual care providers.

The approach of the course is contemplative in nature — learning with our whole selves. It is not simply an intake of information but is designed to be experiential. In its first offering, it attracted people ranging in ages from 18 to 50. Although the groups were comprised mainly of nursing students, there were also chaplains, social workers, ESL teachers, and business administrators.

Ultimately, the hope of this course is to help create a critical mass of professionals within nursing and other disciplines who have the skills, knowledge, attitudes and support necessary to exemplify and foster inclusive spiritual care within holistic practice. And with that, raise up future leaders that will create a culture that tends to the spiritual needs of clients and caregivers alike.

Did I mention there weren't any exams?

For more information regarding this course, please contact: 1-855-830-3300 (nursing students), or U or R Admissions www.uregina.ca/futurestudents/admissions/index.html (non-nursing students).