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State of the Science of Spirituality and Palliative Care Research: Research Landscape and Future Directions

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Introduction

Research conducted over the past few decades has made significant strides towards illuminating the role of spirituality for patients and families living with serious illness. This evidence base demonstrates that spirituality frequently plays a central and complex role in patients' and families' experiences of incurable illness, including influencing quality of life (QOL), and medical decision-making. Advances in this field of research that expand the understanding of the relationships between spirituality and health outcomes and lead to the rigorous development of interventions to address patient and family spiritual needs hold tremendous potential for improving a comprehensive approach to care in serious illness. However, research in the field of spirituality and palliative care is at a critical juncture. While the evidence base has grown, the field lacks consistency in definition and methodological approaches, as well as an overarching framework for future research priorities. This lack of consistency and direction impedes a common framework for discourse regarding fundamental questions such as: 1) **What is spirituality?** 2) What are the key measurement and methodological issues? 3) **What is the evidence regarding the relationship of spirituality and key outcomes?** 4) **How do we best screen for and assess spiritual needs?** 5) **What interventions have been most successful?** And finally, 6) **how do we effectively educate healthcare providers to address spirituality in palliative care?**

With the goal of addressing these questions and identifying research priorities, the National Palliative Care Research Center sponsored a two-day conference involving international research leaders in spirituality and palliative care. The goals of the State of the Science Conference in Spirituality and Palliative Care (SOS-SPC) were to examine the current evidence base related to the aforementioned questions. Each author reviewed a key topic area, identified gaps, and proposed recommendations for future research, which were presented to the authorship team who provided further feedback. The results are divided into two papers: Part I addresses key conceptual and methodological considerations and the current

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