

## Spiritual Needs in Cancer Patients: A Narrative Review

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### ABSTRACT

Cancer is a life-threatening disease and causes physical, psychological, and spiritual problems for sufferers. The fulfillment of spiritual needs is one of the important things to improve the quality of life of cancer patients. However, health services still focus on fulfilling the physical aspect. So comprehensive data is needed regarding the spiritual needs of cancer patients. The purpose of this study was to comprehensively explore the fulfillment of spiritual needs in cancer patients. This study uses the Narrative Review method. Literature review through Ebsco, Pubmed, Science Direct, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar databases. The keywords used in English are "Spirituality OR Spirituality OR spiritual care" AND "cancer" AND "patient". While the keywords in Indonesian used are "spiritual needs OR spirituality OR spiritual care" AND "cancer" AND "patient". The criteria for articles in this study are full text, free access, research articles, review articles, in English and Indonesian, population and samples of cancer patients, and the publication period of the last 10 years (2013-2022). We found 10 articles with different aspects of fulfilling spiritual needs. 4 articles on aspects of the meaning of life and purpose, 2 articles on aspects of strength in belief, 3 articles on spiritual aspects with peace, hope, and gratitude, and 1 article on aspects of connection with the category of social support. There are 4 aspects of fulfilling spiritual needs that are felt by cancer patients, namely the meaning of life and purpose, strength in belief, spirituality with peace, hope, and gratitude, and connection with the category of social support.

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## 1. Introduction

Cancer is a non-communicable disease that occurs due to the growth of an abnormal mass of body tissue cells that cannot be controlled, the growth can spread to surrounding organs (WHO, 2018). The prevalence of cancer as a chronic disease is increasing every year. Basic Health Research data in 2013 stated that the prevalence of cancer reached 1.4 per mile and increased in 2018 to 1.8 per mile (Kemenkes RI, 2018). The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) show the latest data that the growth in the number of cancer sufferers in the world increased by 18.1 million new cases with 9.6 million cases of cancer patients dying (Bray et al., 2018).

Health problems that often arise in cancer patients are physical problems, psychological problems, and spiritual problems (Nuraeni et al., 2016). The consequences of physical problems that are often experienced by cancer patients are pain, fatigue, decreased physical condition, and continuous fatigue (Nuraeni et al., 2016; Quinlan-Woodward et al., 2016). Furthermore, psychological problems that arise in cancer patients are low self-esteem to depression, shock, fear of recurrence and death, apathy, anxiety, and grief, these conditions will worsen the patient's condition if not addressed immediately (Sebti et al., 2015). While spiritual problems that usually arise are self-

esteem problems, problems of spiritual trust, self-distrust, impaired personal relationships due to lack of confidence, and decreased quality of life (Hatamipour et al., 2015).

The impact of cancer is quite complex, covering all aspects including physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects. However, the efforts provided by health services are usually still focused on treating disease or dealing with physical problems (Nuraeni et al., 2016). In advanced cancer patients with terminal conditions, spiritual needs is a valuable thing. Spiritual care for patients with terminal conditions is an important thing to fulfill (Murray, 2004). This is in line that patient spirituality is the only way for the patient's healing process (Mok et al., 2009). In addition, that patients require intervention with a large portion of spiritual needs (McGrath, 2004). Currently, the needs of patients and families for spiritual care and religiosity have increased, especially in cancer patients in the final stages of life who are experiencing the process of searching for purpose and meaning in life (Ferrell et al., 2013).

Spirituality is the relationship between the individual and the Creator. The spiritual aspect of the human aspect refers to the individual's expression of the meaning and purpose of each life process towards oneself, others, and God (Ferrell et al., 2013). Spirituality can be felt by individuals through meditation, nature, and art as a liaison with reality that will give meaning to life (Peteet & Balboni, 2013). One approach to the spiritual aspect to be more connected to God is to pray (Hamid, 2009).

Individual spiritual needs will adjust to their individual conditions. So that the initial step that can be done is the spiritual assessment of the patient. From this assessment, nurses can find out what needs have been met and what needs have not been and need to be fulfilled by the patient, because each individual's spirituality will depend on the individual's perspective and background (Hawari, 2004). Spirituality is personal or individual in which each individual will have his or her own understanding which is influenced by culture, development, life experiences, and individual perceptions of life (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2005).

Research showed that in fulfilling spiritual needs, patients often denied why they had to suffer from cancer, did not accept their condition, and feared that they would soon face death (Taylor et al., 2015). Another study showed that the dimension of religion is the highest presentation needed for spiritual needs (Nuraeni et al., 2016). Fulfillment of spiritual needs plays an important role in cancer patients, so based on the information above, researchers are interested in conducting a literature study on the spiritual needs of cancer patients.

## 2. Methods

This study uses the Narrative Review method with a qualitative descriptive approach. The protocol used is PRISMA flowchart diagram and article quality assessment using The Center for Review and Dissemination and the Joanna Briggs Institute Guideline (Tricco et al., 2018). While the literature search strategy used in this research is to analyze the inclusion and exclusion criteria that have been determined based on the language, type of article, population and sample, and year of publication in each article.

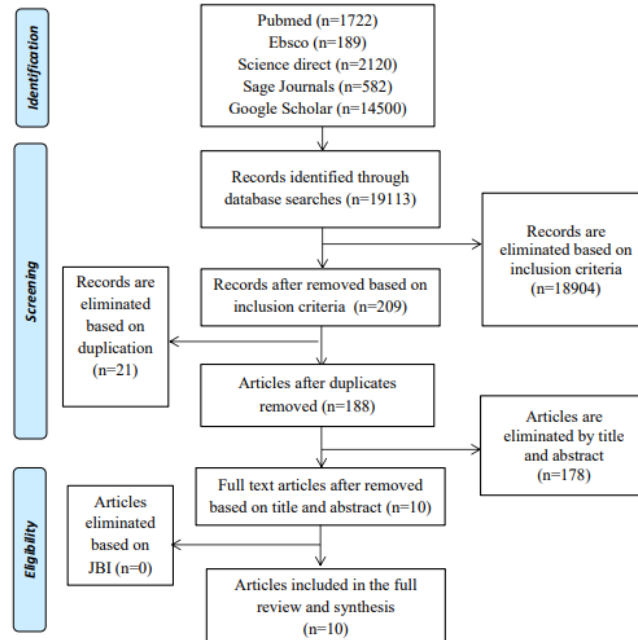
**Table 1.**

Criteria	Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	
	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Language</b>	English and Indonesian	No English and Indonesian
<b>Article Types</b>	Full text, free access, research article, and review article	Abstract article, not free access, not research articles and review articles
<b>Population and sample</b>	Patients diagnosed with cancer	No cancer
<b>Outcome</b>	Spiritual needs of cancer patients	Not aiming to fulfill spiritual needs
<b>Publication Year</b>	Last 10 years (2013-2022)	More than last 10 years

This study uses electronic databases, namely CINAHL (EBSCO), science direct, sagejournal, pubmed, and google scholar. The keywords used in English are "Spiritual needs OR Spirituality OR spiritual care" AND "cancer" AND "patient". While the keywords in Indonesian used are "kebutuhan spiritual OR spiritualitas OR perawatan spiritual" AND "kanker" AND "pasien". The data obtained

were extracted manually and analyzed descriptively.

**Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram**



### 3. Result

The number of articles obtained from the search is 19113 articles. After adjusting to the inclusion criteria, 209 articles were obtained. Further duplication was done and the remaining 188 articles. Then after checking the title and abstract, 10 articles were obtained. All articles describe the fulfillment of spiritual needs in cancer patients, several articles identify the relationship of spiritual needs fulfillment to the quality of life of cancer patients. The results of the article review show that there are 4 major themes in fulfilling spiritual needs, namely the meaning of life and purpose, strength in belief, spirituality with peace, hope, and gratitude, and connection with the category of social support. Researchers identify and classify the results of article reviews based on the 4 major themes above. The results of the analysis will be presented in the following table (Table 2):

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**Table 2.**  
Extraction Data

No	Author and Year	Outcome	Country	Design	Sample	Result
1.	(Al-Natour et al., 2017)	spirituality and quality of life (QoL)	Yordania	Descriptive qualitative	50 participants	There is a significant relationship between spirituality and quality of life. Spirituality is useful for improving social function, quality of life, and psychological well-being
2.	(Astrow et al., 2018)	spiritual needs and perception of quality of care	Yordania	Descriptive qualitative	727 participants	Spiritual needs are influenced by the patient's religion and background. The results showed that high levels of spiritual need are associated with lower levels of satisfaction and perception of quality of care.
3.	(Khoramirad et al., 2015)	sleep quality and religious/spiritual wellbeing	Iran	cross-sectional study	80 participants	There is no significant relationship between sleep quality and spiritual well-being
4.	(Hatamipour et al., 2015)	spiritual needs	Iran	Descriptive qualitative	18 participants	Spiritual needs consist of Connection, Seeking peace, Meaning and purpose, and Transcendence
5.	(Phenwan et al., 2019)	spirituality and spiritual well-being	Thailand	Descriptive qualitative phenomenology design	16 participants	Spirituality is influenced by self-esteem, belonging, and connectedness to nature
6.	(Bai et al., 2016)	spiritual well-being	USA	randomized clinical trial	52 participants	The patient's spiritual well-being is influenced by peace, meaning, and faith
7.	(Forouzi et al., 2017)	Spiritual needs and quality of life	Iran	correlational study	150 participants	Patients with cancer have low spiritual needs and quality of life characterized by low morality and ethics, positivity/hope/peace, and functional components
8.	(Paredes & Pereira, 2018)	Spirituality and posttraumatic growth (PTG)	Portugal	Descriptive quantitative	100 participants	Participants with high spirituality showed high posttraumatic growth (PTG)
9.	(Seyedrasooly et al., 2014)	Perception of prognosis and spiritual well-being	Iran	descriptive-correlational study	15 participants	Patients with high perception of prognosis show high spiritual well-being
10.	(Bai et al., 2015)	spiritual well-being (SpWB) and quality of life (QoL)	Yale-New Haven	a secondary data analysis of a cluster randomized clinical trial	52 participants	There is a relationship between SpWB and QoL, patients with high QoL have strongly than physical and emotional well-being

## **4. Discussion**

Researchers identified from articles with the main focus on the spiritual needs of cancer patients. There are 10 articles that meet the inclusion criteria with research methods, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods with the aim of knowing the fulfillment of the spiritual needs of cancer patients. Broadly speaking, the results of the review show 4 major themes on the fulfillment of spiritual needs, namely the meaning of life and purpose (Astrow et al., 2018; Bai et al., 2015; Hatamipour et al., 2015; Phenwan et al., 2019), strength in belief (Al-Natour et al., 2017; Seyedrasooly et al., 2014), spirituality with peace, hope, and gratitude (Bai et al., 2016; Forouzi et al., 2017; Khoramirad et al., 2015), and Connections with category of social support (Paredes & Pereira, 2018).

There were 10 articles that met the inclusion criteria and were then reviewed in the literature review of this study. All articles discuss spiritual needs and several studies were conducted to determine the fulfillment of spiritual needs for patients' quality of life. Based on the results of a review of 10 journals, 4 major themes were obtained, namely:

### **4.1 Meaning of Life and Purpose**

The results of the research stated that spirituality is an important component of humans and palliative care can affect the quality of life of patients both physically and psychologically (Phenwan et al., 2019). The patient will interpret the life processes that occur and focus on the patient's life goals. Meanwhile, the results of research state that the fulfillment of spiritual needs can make patients accept and strive to overcome their illness (Hatamipour et al., 2015). As many as 59% of patients with cancer consider themselves to be spiritual but not religious. At least one spiritual need reported by 79% is a spiritual need for meaning in life, so that positive perceptions emerge in the treatment process. The research of Bai, et al (2015) shows that the fulfillment of spiritual needs by creating peace and meaning in life contributes a lot in creating quality of life and is of major importance for patients with terminal illnesses (Bai et al., 2015). Faith is positively related to the quality of life of patients who are increasingly enthusiastic about living the life process.

### **4.2 Strength in Belief**

Research by Al-Natour et al., (2017) shows that spirituality is an important aspect in humans, because it can improve functional, social, physical well-being, and can be a source of strength to help improve the quality of life and meaning of life in cancer patients (Al-Natour et al., 2017). Patients also believe that God will give them strength so they believe that they will recover from their illness. Research stated that there was a positive perception of the illness they suffered and judged that their spiritual well-being was high (Seyedrasooly et al., 2014). So that there is a relationship between spiritual well-being and positive beliefs that patients have about their disease. However, some patients only have a positive perception at the beginning of the spiritual treatment period, after 3 months of carrying out the treatment the patient begins to decrease their belief that God will give them strength to face their illness.

### **4.3 Spirituality with peace, hope, and gratitude**

Fulfillment of spiritual needs is one of the efforts so that patients can feel calm, peaceful, and grateful for every incident. So that patients have hope in dealing with cancer. The results of research stated that the fulfillment of spiritual needs can improve the quality of life of cancer patients (Forouzi et al., 2017). In addition, there is also an increase in a sense of peace, meaning in life, and belief in God. So that in the process of health care, they are able to build a sense of peace and follow the flow of care. Meanwhile, based on other research stated that there is a relationship between spiritual well-being and the patient's faith and quality of life (Bai et al., 2016). This can reduce the number of depression and anxiety in patients so that there is peace in carrying out the treatment process. Another study stated that the majority of cancer patients in Iran with sleep disorders after being met with spiritual needs, patients believe more that they will get a lot of strength and support from God and more believe that there is some real purpose for their life to have a better quality of sleep. Other data shows that those who frequently attend mosques or places of worship have a higher quality of sleep. This shows that the fulfillment of spiritual needs can give meaning to life, confidence to get support and help from Allah, and attendance at mosques or places of worship may be useful for improvement (Bai et al., 2016).

### **4.4 Connections with category of social support**

Based on research stated the role of social support from the environment is very important to

understand and deal with adjustment to cancer, social support will make patients better respond to the care provided (Paredes & Pereira, 2018). spirituality can improve the patient's quality of life through improved coping and social support. Cancer patients diagnosed long ago will show a recurrence so that they feel more miserable. Social support from the family becomes a means to build enthusiasm in dealing with the illness.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the literature review show that in each article there are 4 aspects of fulfilling the spiritual needs of cancer patients. The 4 aspects are meaning in life and purpose, strength in belief, spirituality with peace, hope, and gratitude, and connection with social support categories. These four aspects can also improve the quality of life of cancer patients for the better.

The suggestion from this study is the need for further research on the effectiveness of spiritual therapy on the quality of life of patients with cancer. Through this research, researchers can identify deeper information about spiritual healing in cancer patients.

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