

45. Loss of Faith or Other Spiritual Concerns

Most people have deeply held beliefs or convictions about their existence. These include assumptions about the existence of supernatural forces, the meaning of one's life, the nature of the world at large, and what happens after we die. Some of these beliefs are formally embodied in spiritual faiths such as religions but this is not true for everyone.

A diagnosis of cancer can force people to consider their mortality and inevitably brings with it many fundamental issues relating to one's religious faith or personal beliefs. Such questions like "*Why me?*" or "*What did I do to deserve this?*" can often lead to spiritual or religious doubt, or for the patient to morally scrutinise their own past actions, e.g. previous relationships, smoking, lifestyle choices etc. Catastrophic events like cancer can leave people feeling lost in a spiritual sea without reference points – it can take time to adjust one's internal picture of the world to be able to make sense of what is apparently unfair and meaningless. This loss of existential meaning leads individuals to ask themselves "*What is the point?*" suggesting that they question the futility of struggling with the physical and psychological suffering associated with cancer. This loss of spiritual meaning, or existential despair, may be a precursor to depression.

How can I manage my feelings?

- It is important that you inform the health care workers of your faith and whether you have specific needs related to your religion.
- If you have an established religion, is there a particular member of your religious community that you feel you could talk to?
- You may prefer to share your beliefs and experiences with a partner, close friend or nurse.
- Most hospitals have a chaplaincy department which can offer spiritual care, whatever your faith or spiritual tradition, including those who do not have any particular affiliation.

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

45. Loss of Faith/Spiritual - Resources/Information

Local Resources:

<p>Hospital Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Chapel, Level 1 NDDH There is also a small courtyard garden that can be accessed via the chapel. There is a prayer room for groups. Volunteers visit each ward including Seamoor Unit, during the week and chaplains are available from 8.00-4.00pm and on Sunday mornings.</p>	<p>Whether a patient, or relative the chaplaincy team are here to support you. They focus on the wellbeing of the whole person and seek to engage with people of all faiths or none, respecting your uniqueness, integrity and confidentiality. Please ask the ward staff if you would like to see a chaplain or a chaplaincy visitor, or you can let them know by telephoning 01271 322362 and leaving a message for the team.</p>
<p>Cancer Care Counselling Service Fern Centre, NDDH</p>	<p>Jess French. Lead Cancer Care Counsellor Email: ndht.cancercarecounselling@nhs.net Telephone: 01271 334472 (ext. 5672)</p>
<p>Talkworks 109 Boutport Street Call: 0300 555 3344 Or visit www.talkworks.dpt.nhs.uk for online form</p>	<p>Are you struggling to cope, feeling low, anxious or overwhelmed by your thoughts or feelings? Are you living with a health condition that is making you tired, worried and frustrated?</p>

National Resources:

<p>NHS 111</p>	<p>Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available</p>
<p>NHS Website</p>	<p>Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — Monday – Friday 9am—8pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230</p>
<p>Macmillan on-line Community</p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!</p>
<p>Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>

Other Resources :

<p>Macmillan Booklets:</p>	<p>Talking about your cancer</p>
	<p>Managing the symptoms of cancer MAC11671</p>
	<p>How are you feeling? PDF— MAC11593_E05_N</p>
	<p>Cancer and relationships— MAC17643_E01_N</p>