

spirituality & health



Bernard Palmer is a consultant surgeon in Hertfordshire

Bernard Palmer reminds us that everyone has spiritual needs



What a tragedy it is that there are a few influential people in our society who see medicine only in terms of biochemistry, anatomy and physiology.

The following is an extract from Alister McGrath's excellent book on the history of atheism called *The Twilight of Atheism*:¹

'There is now growing awareness of the importance of spirituality in healthcare, both as a positive factor in relation to well being and as an issue to which patients have a right. The major conference 'Spirituality and Healing in Medicine', sponsored by Harvard Medical School in 1998, drew public opinion and professional attention as never before to this issue of incorporating spirituality into professional medicine. It was there reported that that 86% of Americans as a whole, 99% of family physicians, and 94% of HMO professionals now believe that prayer, meditation, and other spiritual and religious practices exercise a major positive role within the healing process.'

The question is not whether health practitioners should introduce spiritual topics but how to do so without causing offence. Clearly such conversations must be for the patient's potential interest. Furthermore it is important to obtain verbal consent to discuss such matters. This should be repeatedly obtained during the two way discussion so that no misunderstandings can occur.

We all have needs whatever our background, religion and social situation. We need to find answers to guilt of the past, to why we are here in the present, and how to obtain the power to live as we ought in the future. Everybody has spiritual needs that affect our well-being. The World Health Organisation has stated that well-being in the physical, emotional, social and spiritual realms, is the definition of health. ■

REFERENCE

1. McGrath A. *The Twilight of Atheism, the rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world*. London: Rider & Co, 2009:63