

religious identity during hospital admissions: cultural baggage or anchor of the soul?

Research project aims

It is commonly believed that spirituality is significant for hospital patients, whether or not they identify with a religion, and that patients who practice a religion value support from their own spiritual community. Yet there is a lack of contemporary Australian data to support these claims. There has not been any systematic attempt to obtain patient views on their religion, their spirituality, and how their choice of Religious Identifier impacts their illness and hospital experience.

Royal Melbourne Hospital Pastoral and Spiritual Services, in collaboration with **Spiritual Health Victoria**, is researching these claims:

Key Research Questions:

1. How important is religious identity to patients, and how do they articulate its meaning and significance?
2. How does religious identity and associated spiritual beliefs and praxis affect patients' experience of illness?
3. How does it affect patients' experience of hospitalisation?

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Methodology

This mixed methods research follows our Religious Identifiers QA Project (2013-14) wherein 1742 patients were surveyed, their choices recorded, and subsequent services modified accordingly. 76% nominated a religion, 24% nominated 'No Religion'.

Additionally, this project includes two-tiered qualitative data. The first tier is gathered during initial assessment, wherein patient choices are collated under five categories:

1. Pastoral Care by RMH staff including an explicit religious/spiritual dimension
2. Pastoral Care by RMH staff plus faith community involvement
3. Faith community involvement only
4. Pastoral Care by RMH staff for emotional/personal needs only
5. Declined any Pastoral Care

The second qualitative tier will contribute verbatim 'patient experience' data. Interviews (HREC approval pending) will seek more detailed information about the meaning and significance of religion and spirituality during hospital experience. We will proportionally identify patients who reflect Melbourne Health's broad religious and cultural demographic.

Significance

This research will provide useful data on patient beliefs, meaning and enable articulation of religion and spirituality and its relevance to experiences of illness and hospitalisation.

Community and healthcare standards require an holistic approach to healthcare, which addresses spiritual wellbeing and resources as well as physical, mental and emotional. This research seeks to identify and clarify the significance of spiritual aspects of healthcare, to enable more holistic healthcare.

There is little contemporary data on these matters, so this research will contribute to the establishment of core data, including important 'patient experience' stories currently unavailable.



Spiritual Health Victoria