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## **WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY, SPIRITUAL CLIMATE AND PATIENT SAFETY CULTURE**

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### **Abstract**

Spirituality plays a very important role for most people in the world. Its meaning has also begun to be recognized in the context of organizational functioning. Spirituality in the workplace and the spiritual climate play a significant role in stress reduction, in situations of job burnout and in various crisis situations. Hence, they become an important element of organizational culture. Spirituality plays a major role in public trust bodies, particularly in healthcare. This article aims to highlight the role of the spiritual climate in healthcare, spirituality at work, and their role in creating patient safety and patient safety culture. This kind of climate is not only important for the employees themselves, who find meaning in their work thanks to spirituality but most of all for the patients. It gives them a sense of security and allows them to recover more quickly.

*Keywords:* religion, organizational, culture, safety, healthcare

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### **1. Introduction**

Patient safety is a fundamental requirement of any healthcare system. It is a multidimensional phenomenon and depends on many different factors. Taking the perspective of a specific medical facility, it is emphasized that patient safety is closely linked to the organizational culture and, more specifically, to the patient safety culture. From the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning of culture was “the tilling of land, an act of preparing the earth for crops”. It originated from Latin *cultura* meaning “a cultivating” figuratively “care, culture, an honouring” [1]. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, ‘to cultivate’ is to relate to something earnestly, with care, and patience, to devote oneself to something whether it is a field, a mind, or anything else (In III Sent. dist. 9, q.1, a.1, qc.1, c: “Illud enim coli dicitur cui studiose intenditur, sicut ager vel animus, vel quidquid aliud”) [2]. One of the first definitions of culture can be found in a study by the German philosopher and writer, Johann Gottfried Herder, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to this author, culture is a way of life developed by a community (e.g. a people, or a nation) [3]. In the Social sciences, including Management science, the concept of culture emerged thanks to the Canadian physician, and psychologist, Elliot Jaques. The scientist discloses the term “enterprise culture”

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as “a habitual, tradition-based way of thinking and a mode of action that all employees of this enterprise share to a greater or lesser extent and which must be assimilated and at least partially accepted by newcomers to these new team members became ‘their’ people in it” [4]. It follows from this definition that culture should be developed, nurtured and adopted throughout the organization. It should be demonstrated on a daily basis, with a belief in its value. There are many definitions of organizational culture, and among the most popular are those proposed by Gerd Hofstede and Edgar Schein. According to Hofstede, organizational culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” [5]. Schein defines it as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” [6]. Scientists point out that culture is “one of the basic forms of the capital of an organization that brings profit both to the organization itself and to its individual members” [7]. According to Hofstede et al. [5] and Schein [6] the top, most visible part of culture is the organizational climate. As Schein points out “organizational climate emanates from the organization’s physical appearance, employees, clientele, and many other experienced ‘cultural artefacts’”. He defines climate as “a cultural artefact resulting from espoused values and shared tacit assumptions” [8]. Organizational climate refers to the subjective perceptions of employees or other stakeholders about the atmosphere in the workplace. It shapes employee motivation, influences productivity reflects the level of satisfaction as well as the successes achieved. Organizational climate constructs should reflect employees’ perceptions of specific strategic priorities of the organization [9]. The climate is sometimes referred to as the “organizations’ spirituality”, “the environment that cultivates the spirit of employees” [10], “workplace spiritual climate” [11], or even “a socio-moral atmosphere” [12]. The extent of this phenomenon is interdisciplinary. Indeed, the importance of and need for spiritual formation has been recognized, for example, in the public administration sector [13], in higher education [14], or in policy [15].

This article aims to highlight the role of the spiritual climate in healthcare, spirituality at work, and their role in creating patient safety and patient safety culture. This kind of climate is not only important for the employees themselves, who find meaning in their work thanks to spirituality but most of all for the patients. V. Hernández et al. speak directly about the atmosphere of healthy, warm and humane treatment [16].

In order to achieve the aim of the work, a review and critical analysis of the literature on the studied phenomenon was used. The focus was primarily on the content analysis taking into account the selected cases of the influence of the spiritual climate on the behaviour of employees and the well-being of patients. Finally, the method of synthesis and logical reasoning was applied.

## **2. Spirituality and spiritual climate in the workplace**

Spirituality is a difficult concept to define and is often confused with religiosity. However the Latin root of “spirituality” is *spiritus*, meaning “breath”, and early use of the term, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, for Christians, referred to “the influence of God in human lives - the Holy Spirit” [17].

Religiosity is essentially linked to a specific worldview, a stated faith and a belief in the supernatural explanation of specific phenomena. One of the numerous ways people show their spirituality is through religion. It can be defined as “adherence to a belief system and practices associated with a tradition in which there is agreement about what is believed and practiced” [11]. Spirituality, in contrast, is recognized as “a more general feeling of closeness and connectedness to the sacred” [18]. A human being’s need and capacity to transcend themselves and the environment in which they function are what are largely connected to spirituality, which is not always connected to the supernatural world. Faith, a quest for life’s meaning and purpose, and a sense of community are characteristics of spirituality, which transcends religious and cultural barriers and gives rise to a sense of inner peace and well-being [19]. Wellbeing is in general a term used to describe “a condition of an individual or a group, with reference to the social, economic, psychological, spiritual, or medical attention” [20]. As Popoveniuc convinces, spirituality engages the whole inner human potential orienting toward higher purposes, values, and scopes [21]. Spirituality can be defined as “a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, and transcendence and experience relationships to self, family, others, community, society, music, nature, and the significant or sacred” [22]. According to the Polish Society for Spiritual Care in Medicine, the concept of spirituality encompasses the search for existential relating to the meaning of life, one’s own dignity, and a sense of who one is as a person [<http://ptodm.org.pl/ptodm/171384,co-to-jest-duchowosc>].

Because spirituality, including religion, are central aspects in many people’s lives that guide them on a daily basis and allow them to cope with stress [23], it has been observed that in most cases individuals turn to spirituality when they face a deep crisis in their life such as the loss of a job, life-threatening disease, divorce, etc. [24]. The transfer of spirituality to the workplace is primarily related to the continuous changes in the work environment, the stress accompanying work, job dissatisfaction, high turnover rates, excessive work responsibilities, and professional burnout [25, 26]. Certainly, this kind of feeling accompanies high-risk professions, which undoubtedly include the medical profession. The very high social expectations, professional responsibility, and above all, the ethical principles and the medical maxim *primum non nocere* are not insignificant in this case. Moreover, many organizations around the world have begun to recognize that spirituality in the workplace fills a gap in the needs of those employees who expect more than material gratification from their work. Organizations such as Boeing, AT&T, Pizza Hut, and Deloitte are known and

reported to have increased employee motivation, engagement, and a sense of unity with the company by nurturing workplace spirituality and integrating spirituality into their development strategies [27]. Deeper human connections can be a source of spiritual comfort as well. By fostering an environment where workers feel important, respected, protected, and welcomed by a community of individuals who share their beliefs, employers can foster employee thankfulness. In the case of health care, these can include more or less formal meetings between doctors and other staff, sharing feelings, hopes, or difficulties. For example, the results of a randomized trial conducted among doctors working at the Mayo Clinic, involving group meetings aimed at deepening reflection, developing mindfulness, and the sharing of experiences, showed significant improvements in terms of work engagement, sense of meaning in their work and a reduction in depersonalization, and work burnout. Importantly, this beneficial effect persisted for one year after the experiment [28]. As Fry argues, the shift from old, central, bureaucratic, highly standardized, fear-based, and non-spiritual organizations to more flexible, democratic and humane ones was prompted by the quick changes in modern society [29]. An important new way to comprehend companies is by their level of organizational spiritual maturity. Hence, the current literature also discusses the phenomenon of organizational spiritual maturity, recognized as an important new way of understanding modern organizations [30-32].

In general workplace spirituality can be defined as a “framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy” [33]. McKee et al. define it “as meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment with organizational values” [34]. According to Thompson spirituality in the workplace is related to “how an employee feels in the workplace, whether it is a job or a vocation” [35]. Sanders et al. define spirituality in the workplace as “the degree to which an organization fosters a sense of personal meaning and interconnectedness among employees” [36]. Researchers agree that spirituality at work leads to personal and collective appreciation when being an employee. Grateful people are happier, more positive, satisfied with their lives, and experience less depression and anxiety than those who are not grateful [37]. Spiritual workers are more optimistic and hopeful about whatever adversity they face [38].

The collective perception of these important conditions for the employee shapes the spiritual climate of an organization. A spiritual climate is “a type of organizational climate that enables individuals to integrate their spirituality in their workplaces for the benefit of the entire organization and its stakeholders” [23]. It refers to the collective perception of employees’ work environment. It promotes inner harmony among employees through meaningful work, hope, and integrity [23]. Various definitions of this phenomenon can be pointed out: “a collective perception of the employees about the workplace that facilitates harmony with self through meaningful work, transcendence from the limited

self, and operates in harmony with the social and natural environment with a sense of interconnectedness within”, “the prevailing perception about the work and immediate work group that has spiritual content” [39]; “a common understanding among employees towards spirituality and the par-taking of the shared spirituality of the workplace” [40]. On the other hand, as argued by Sarkar and Garg a spiritual climate provides avenues and opportunities for realizing and practicing personal spirituality in the workplace [41]. According to Pandey et al. spiritual climate is based on three pillars, such as harmony with self, harmony in the work environment, and transcendence [39]. Harmony with self means that employees recognize their own abilities and enjoy their work. Harmony in the workplace is important in interacting with the social and natural conditions of the workplace, and transcendence means being immersed in one’s work and being aware of one’s duties and oneself.

The results of various studies addressing healthcare services conducted by researchers around the world confirm that a positive spiritual climate translates into good performance at work, staff engagement, dedication in the workplace, psychological well-being, and improved efficiency [23, 25, 42-44]. Workplace spirituality and spiritual climate also have been shown to translate into a reduction in aggression and violence at work [41, 45]. It was also confirmed that spiritual climate correlates positively with team and safety climate. In addition, healthcare professionals confirming a good spiritual climate in their workplace are more productive [45]. Through the spiritual climate, a kind of spiritual capital is created, which, according to Zymonik [46], is the sum of the dimension of shared meanings and values, and ultimate goals. This kind of capital is generated by spiritual intelligence, i.e. the ability to search for what enriches one’s life, and allows one to give it meaning value, and a sense of purposeful existence, including in the workplace. The same author adds that spiritual capital can be an important element in the strategy of an organization focused on social engagement and doing good, which translates into a higher value for that organization [46]. Medical facilities certainly belong to this group of entities.

Many studies confirm the positive impact of workplace spirituality and spiritual climate during the time of covid-19 pandemic [47, 48]. According to Anzenruber practicing spirituality at work during covid-19 had an impact on organizational commitment in a range of healthcare personnel, including doctors, nurses, physicians, administrators, managers and cleaning staff, during severe crises [49].

### **3. Patient safety and patient safety culture**

Regardless of the situation and context, however, all healthcare professionals, have a responsibility to provide care that will ensure that the patient is safe. The concept of patient safety is considered a critical element of every healthcare system and is one of the main qualitative features in healthcare organizations [50]. According to World Health Organization (WHO) quality in

health care can be defined in many ways but there is growing acknowledgment that most of all quality health services should be “effective - providing evidence-based healthcare services to those who need them; safe - avoiding harm to people for whom the care is intended; and people-centred - providing care that responds to individual preferences, needs, and values” [51]. To realize the benefits of quality health care services must be offered in a timely manner and be characterized by efficiency, equitability and integration [51]. Patient safety (PS) can be defined as the “absence of preventable harm to a patient during the process of healthcare” [51]. According to the SimPatIE dictionary patient safety is recognized as “the continuous identification, analysis, and management of patient-related risks and incidents in order to make patient care safer and minimize harm to patients” [52]. Those definitions directly reflect the well-known medical maxim *primum non nocere* (first, do no harm). Furthermore, it somewhat alludes to the fact that in medicine and in patient care, adverse events (AE) nevertheless occur. Events of this type are a consequence of the appearance of errors made in the care process. Because patient safety is an ever-changing and regressing goal, it has been noted that as standards improve and safety concerns grow, the types of incidents deemed to be a threat to patient safety are becoming more diverse [53]. Such events also include, for example, post-traumatic stress, violation of patient dignity, or shaken confidence in recovery. An AE is a harmful and negative outcome that happens when a patient has been provided with medical care. Medical treatment may include a procedure, surgery, or medication. Any patient who undergoes treatment may experience a negative outcome as a result of that treatment. AE can include medication side effects, injury, or death, but also psychological harm or trauma [54]. This is why the healing climate created in a facility is so important in patient care. This climate fosters a sense of security for the patient and creates the conditions for a faster recovery, both physically and mentally. Importantly, religion and spirituality play an important role in the medical decisions of many patients, and bearing in mind human rights, they should be respected. As an example, the patient’s choice of diet and even refusal to undergo certain medical procedures, such as blood transfusions, can be indicated [55]. Patients often discover strength and solace in their spirituality, both informally through deeper connections with family and friends, and formally through religious or quasi-religious communities and practices. This kind of spirituality can also be guaranteed by the patient’s interaction with medical staff. For example, it has been confirmed that when nurses share similar spiritual values with their patients, patient safety increases [11]. It should be added that there is undoubtedly a preponderance of work in the literature on this issue as far as nurses are concerned. This is probably due to the fact that the work environment of nurses is different from that of other employees, and the physical, psychological, and spiritual state of nurses influences the quality of care they provide, particularly when they are coping with a heavy workload and multiple pressures [56]. However, the results of research among doctors in China are also known [57]. This study investigated the effects of mindfulness meditation on

doctors' mindfulness, patient safety culture, patient safety competency, and adverse events. In the experimental group, those dimensions were significantly higher compared with those of the control group. Also, adverse events in the experimental group were significantly lower than in the control group. It was concluded that a simple and effective intervention, mindfulness meditation plays a positive role in improving patient safety and has a certain promotional value.

#### **4. Spiritual climate as a necessary element of patient safety culture**

With this in mind, it should be emphasized that the concept of patient safety and spiritual work conditions should be considered essential components of healthcare systems and form the main pillars of quality care in many healthcare organizations [58]. The studies cited earlier [57] confirm that such an approach fully corresponds to the essence of a patient safety culture (PSC), which is perceived as a key element of the overall organizational culture aimed to improve patient safety and provide a relevant level of medical care [59]. The link between spirituality, the spiritual climate, and creating a patient safety culture is shown among others by [48, 58, 60, 61]. PSC as an idea comes from the concept of safety culture and gained significance after the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in 1986 [62]. Since the publication of the famous report 'To Err is Human' in 2000, this phenomenon has become more and more noticeable in the medical area, first in the United States, then internationally. According to American Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, "the patient's safety culture is the product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies, and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organization's health and safety management" [<https://psnet.ahrq.gov>]. However, despite the already extensive scientific sources on patient safety culture, confirmed by literature reviews [63, 64] and the already numerous tools for measuring it [65-67] the spiritual climate is not seen literally to be embedded in the essence of this culture. The idea of a climate of spirituality as an important factor influencing patient safety culture has so far not been reflected in any of the officially existing tools for measuring this culture. So far, a formal, but only residual, reference to spirituality in patient care has been written into the accreditation standards for patient care. For example, in the document titled 'Joint Commission International Accreditation Standards for Hospitals' there are two modest notations as follows: "PCC.1.2 - The hospital provides care that supports patient dignity, is respectful of the patient's personal values and beliefs, and responds to requests for spiritual and religious observance"; "AOP.1.1 - Each patient's initial assessment includes a physical examination and health history as well as an evaluation of psychological, spiritual/cultural (as appropriate), social, and economic factors" [68]. The interpretation of the above provisions may vary, depending on the capacity of the specific hospital facility. For example, in the case of one of the world's most prestigious medical facilities, the Mayo Clinic, the patient can have ongoing contact with clergy of various religions, numerous

chapels, and special areas for meditation. According to the available communication, “The goal of Spiritual Care at Mayo Clinic is to engage the spiritual dimensions of people - their beliefs, faiths, cultures, values and religious practices for healing, well-being, and growth. We believe that faith, values, and spiritual practices are vital resources for healing and well-being.” [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/minnesota/resources/spiritual-religious-services>]

It is encouraging, however, to see that various initiatives are increasingly being taken around the world to foster a spiritual climate and spirituality in the workplace, as well as patient safety. A major breakthrough in this regard was the covid-19 pandemic. For example, a number of initiatives are currently being taken to disseminate the practice and meditation of yoga to both medical staff and patients. This is done with significant support and promotion from the WHO and the United Nations. It was recognized, *inter alia*, that yoga is inexpensive, is correlated with positive lifestyle habits, improves well-being, and can be done by all ages and stages of health. Those who practice yoga regularly are less likely to exhibit chronic mental and physical health problems, making it highly attractive as a means to promote global well-being while reducing healthcare costs and affording individuals greater autonomy over their health. Yoga is considered part of daily health care, but also as a practice and meditation recommended for medical professionals and patients undergoing treatment, such as hospital treatment [<https://themindedinstitute.com/yoga-in-healthcare/yoga-healthcare-around-the-world/>]. Research confirms that, for example, music, transcendental and Ayurvedic meditation also play an important role in reducing stress and burnout among employees and creating an atmosphere of safety and well-being [69-71]. As far as patients are concerned, studies conducted by Slagter et al. have confirmed the positive impact of meditation, mindfulness, and yoga for those with rheumatoid arthritis [72]. The above practices are examples of mind-body therapies (MBTs), which are techniques that create an interaction between the mind and bodily functions to obtain relaxation and enhance overall health. All three of these MBTs have been shown to have multiple health benefits [72]. Similar effects have been demonstrated in hemodialysis patients [73], in patients with sarcoidosis [74], or psoriasis [75]. In contrast, Chinese Chan-Chuang qigong breathing meditation has shown positive effects on the health and well-being of breast cancer patients [76]. Research is also known to confirm the fact that recovery is facilitated by the conditions for collective or individual prayer created for patients by staff in the hospital or other medical centres [77-80]. The example of care, including spiritual care, for oncological ill children evacuated from Ukraine, described in *The Lancet*, can also be an excellent confirmation in this regard [81]. Not insignificant are the various spiritual rituals, symbols, and artefacts that accompany the patient during his stay in the hospital [82].



## **5. Conclusions**

This article shows how important and desirable a phenomenon in a modern medical organization is spirituality and spiritual climate. Incorporating these aspects into the overall organizational culture, in particular into the culture of patient safety, results from the need to strengthen the sense of safety of patients and the need to ensure the well-being of employees. The discussed phenomenon does not only apply to healthcare organizations, which confirms that modern companies and the people who manage them see the need for internal changes that favour organizational resilience. It should be emphasized that the examples presented can be seen as evidence that building a culture of patient safety, especially in difficult times such as the recent pandemic, or the war in Ukraine, requires a new, more spiritual approach to healthcare and those in need. This also requires a different motivation and activation of staff than before, who, working under the pressure of time, expectations, and ethical obligations, must remain fully available and competent to serve the patient. Building a culture of patient safety is therefore not only the fulfilment of specific medical procedures or compliance with patient safety rules, but also creating a climate in which the patient is treated as a subject, and his or her sense of security is the highest priority. This climate should be enriched with spiritual issues, allowing patients not only to cope with the stress associated with staying in a hospital or other medical facility but also to promote a faster recovery. The spiritual climate should also be treated as an important binder and motivating factor for the medical staff. Of course, it is necessary to identify the needs in this regard in advance. For this reason, and for the benefit of employees, a spiritual climate should be nurtured and adapted to changing and dynamic working conditions.

In the history of human beings, religious or spiritual leaders and health providers were often the same. Only in recent times has medicine taken on a scientific approach that has resulted in a separation between medicine, religion, and spirituality. Unfortunately, health providers may not take individual, religious, or spiritual beliefs into account when they are dealing with difficult medical decisions for patients and their families [55]. Nevertheless, one cannot fail to notice how important this phenomenon is in the treatment process. Numerous scientific pieces of evidence do not allow us to underestimate this phenomenon.

Taking into account the existing experience and methods of measuring and evaluating patient safety culture it should be postulated that the existing assessment tools should include aspects that will concern this issue. Because of its proven meanings and influence on patient well-being, a stronger emphasis on the spiritual climate in healthcare accreditation standards should also be considered.

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