



# European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

Newsletter Oktober 2008

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## Editorial

### Dear colleagues, dear friends

Spirituality and health gains growing interest and the field constitutes itself more and more. A recent example is the formation of TASK (Transdisciplinary Working Group for Spirituality and Illness – Transdisziplinäre Arbeitsgruppe für Spiritualität und Krankheit) and its first meeting, held in Bad Tölz, Germany, September 2008. This network focusing on the German-speaking part of Europe provides the opportunity for different workgroups and institutions to build a platform.

Similar processes can be observed in other countries too: The (American) Society for Spirituality, Theology & Health was founded last year and at the end of the European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health in May 2008 in Bern there was the clear vote for a European platform or society too.

This newsletter gives a summary of the first TASK-meeting as well as an outlook. Thanks to Prof. Dr. Arndt Büssing and Dr. Niko Kohls for their contribution.

*Franz Fischer*

## Topic

### Transdisciplinary Working Group for Spirituality and Illness (TASK)

#### Background

A spiritual/religious disposition or practice appears in many cases to have a positive effect on how people deal with an illness. As a coping strategy in the sense of an adjustment process, spirituality/religiosity can encourage the patient's self-esteem, give a meaning to life and provide emotional comfort and hope. Spirituality can be un-

derstood as an attitude towards life with a conscious or implicit relationship to a reality which lies above the immediate "I" and its goals. For many people, a new relationship context opens up, which leads beyond mere physical limits and thus provides them with a foothold and meaning despite existing symptoms of an illness. As a matter of fact, especially the chronically ill have quite definite spiritual needs. These are hardly or not supported by the medical system, because they apparently do not belong to the „area of responsibility“ and are generally unknown to the medical carers. Spirituality is about every person's making sense of things, yet is also a framework of orientation above and beyond the symptoms of their illness. It is thus vitally important that spirituality can find its place (again) in medical care, to help people deal with and make sense of illnesses. Even after a renunciation of institutionalized religiosity, many patients retain a basic spiritual need which seeks expression, yet - particularly in the case of an illness - does not always have a recipient.

#### Network

With the readiness to broach the issue of spirituality as a phenomenon relevant to health, which is just as much a part of life as mental and physical presence, as well as to deal scientifically with the complex themes of spirituality/religiosity, health and illness with joint conventions, publications and research projects, university task groups in the German-speaking regions have created a network called the "Transdisciplinary Working Group for Spirituality and Illness (TASK)". This interdisciplinary cooperation attempts to deal with the topic of spirituality (which has been severely marginalized in medicine) as a resource, particularly for the chronically ill, in a scientifically-based and religiously neutral manner, in order to have a hand in implementing it in day-to-day, practical health care.

The group was founded upon a joint initiative of Prof. Dr. Harald Walach (School of Social Sciences, University of Northampton, UK), Prof. Dr. Arndt Büssing (Medical Faculty, University of Witten/Herdecke, Germany), Dr. Niko Kohls (Generation Research Program (GRP) of the Social Sciences Center, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich) as well as Prof. Dr. Klaus Baumann (Caritas Science and Christian Social Work at the Institute for Practical Theology, Albert Ludwig University, Freiburg i.Br., Germany).

#### Formation of TASK

Prof. Dr. Ernst Pöppel and Dr. Herbert Plischke of GRP sent invitations for a constitutive meeting on 11/12 September 2008 in Bad Tölz, which was kindly supported by the Theophrastus Foundation as well as the Helixor Foundation as well as by the Bad Tölz Regional Authorities, who provided the meeting rooms.

In his welcoming speech, Prof. Dr. Ernst Pöppel specifically pointed out the special importance of this event. The eight lectures given during the two-day event showed the topic's wide-ranging scope:

- Prof. Dr. Tobias Esch: Neurobiological Aspects of Faith and Spirituality: Limbic Activity and Endogenous Morphine
- Prof. Dr. Arndt Büssing: Spirituality/Religiosity as a Resource when Dealing with Chronic Illness – Empirical Research
- Prof. Dr. Wilfried Belschner: Spirituality – Consciousness and Psychological Perspectives
- Dr. Stefan Huber: Theistic and Pantheistic Spirituality Patterns – International Findings of the Religion Monitor 2008
- Dr. Karin Meissner: Short-term Effects of Participation in a Healing Ritual on Mental and Vegetative Functions
- Prof. Dr. Wilfried Schnepf: The Importance of Hope for the Chronically Ill

- Prof. Dr. Götz Mundle: Psychological Health and Emotional Acceptance of Illness
- Prof. Dr. Peter Matthiessen: Gaining Health through Illness. Illness and Development

### Decisions

In the self-constitutive meeting which followed, the approximately 70 participants from different scientific fields jointly agreed that scientific discussions should be the main focus. TASK is understood as being an informal gathering of scientists—based on plurality of dialogue and interdisciplinary cooperation—and cooperative networks with national and international task forces and networks who pursue similar concerns.

The consensual future orientation, TASK's Mission, can be divided into three areas:

1. Theoretical Discussion
2. Fundamental Research/Health Services Research
3. Translation (implementation/training)

Via the participants, psychology, medicine, health care, sociology, religious studies and theology are included as independent disciplines.

Prof. Dr. Arndt Büssing (Medicine), Dr. Niko Kohls (Psychology), Prof. Dr. Dr. Harald Walach (Psychology) and Prof. Dr. Klaus Baumann (Theology) shall continue to act as an operative steering group. The concrete implementation and organization of the projects will be undertaken within task focal points, led by the theme leaders:

- Terms/Definitions: Dr. Eckart & Elisa Ruschmann
- Fundamental Research: Prof. Tobias Esch, Dr. Karin Meissner, Hanni Boberg MSC
- Health Services Research: Prof. Dr. Arndt Büssing, Prof. Dr. Wilfried Schnepf
- Practical Application: Prof. Peter F. Matthiessen, Dr. Marie-Louise Gander
- Apprenticeship/Training: Dr. Niko Kohls, Prof. Dr. Karin Wilkening,
- Boundary Experiences: Prof. Dr. Kurt Weis
- Construction of a content management system: PD Dr. Thomas Ostermann

### Outlook

Within the framework of the European Convention for Integrative Medicine, TASK has organized a 1 ½-hour satellite symposium

which will take place in Berlin on 7 November 2008. The speakers will be Prof. Dr. Ernst Pöppel, Prof. Dr. Arndt Büssing, Dr. Niko Kohls and Prof. Dr. Dr. Harald Walach.

TASK's next thematic meeting will once again take place upon invitation by the GRP and be held in Bad Tölz in September 2009. The group is planning synoptic lectures, workshops and plenary meetings. Information on this event will be posted on the TASK website: <http://www.grp.hwz.uni-muenchen.de/task>

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and  
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## Announcements

### Care and Spirituality (Soins et Spiritualité)

*November, 24, 2008*

Lausanne, Switzerland

Organisation: Centre de Formation et de Recherche de l'Aumônerie oecuménique du CHUV

Contact: Sophie Pointet [sophie.pointet@chuv.ch](mailto:sophie.pointet@chuv.ch), Cosette Odier [cosette.odier@chuv.ch](mailto:cosette.odier@chuv.ch)

### International Psychology of Religion Conference

*August, 23-27, 2009*

Vienna, Austria

Organisation: International Association for the Psychology of Religion (IAPR), [www.iapr.de](http://www.iapr.de)

Contact: Sebastian Murken, [smurken@mainz-online.de](mailto:smurken@mainz-online.de)

### 4<sup>th</sup> International Student Conference on Spiritual Care – Two days conference for student nurse, midwives and health professionals of all faiths

*April, 23-24, 2009*

Haralds plass Deaconess University College, Bergen, Norway

Organisation: Betanien Diakonale Hogskole, in collaboration with Nurses Christian Fellowship International, Europe

Contact: [hdh@haraldsplass.no](mailto:hdh@haraldsplass.no); [www.haraldsplass.no](http://www.haraldsplass.no)

### 2<sup>nd</sup> TASK-Meeting

*September, 2009*

Bad Tölz, Germany

Contact: Niko Kohls, [nkohls@gmail.com](mailto:nkohls@gmail.com)

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health 2010

Bern, Switzerland

The Conference aims to enhance the interdisciplinary dialogue between medicine, neuroscience and theology. Experts will give comprehensive overviews on recent topics, covering physical as well as mental health issues. Symposia invite discussion and free communications allow research groups to present their research projects and findings. Another emphasis is to strengthen networking among researchers in the field and to promote scientific projects.

Contact: René Hefti, [info@rish.ch](mailto:info@rish.ch)

### Pre-Conference Research Workshop with Prof. Koenig

*2010*

Preceding the European Conference on Religion and Spirituality there will be the opportunity to participate in a 4-day research workshop with Prof. Harold Koenig, accepting participants of any education level or degree.

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### Impressum

This Newsletter is published quarterly by the Research Institute of Spirituality and Health, Langenthal, Switzerland.

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