experience connectivity with others, yet deny being spiritual or religious:

- Defining spirituality as psychological wellbeing, associates it directly with mental health, making interpretation of the relationship between spirituality and health, especially mental health, impossible.

Koenig suggested that the term spirituality should refer to the sacred when it is used in research.

Sessanna et al (2007) argued that, in order to recognise spiritual wellbeing or spiritual distress, it was necessary to clearly define spirituality, otherwise holistic healing processes would be misunderstood. In a concept analysis of the definition of spirituality in nursing and health related literature, these authors found the following four themes:

- Spirituality as being the same as religion;
- Spirituality as meaning and purpose in life as well as connection with others;
- Spirituality as non-religious belief and value systems;
- Spirituality as transcendent or metaphysical.

It is apparent from these themes that spiritual needs can be completely non-religious or incorporated with religious beliefs.

To completely exclude religious aspects or separate them from spiritual needs could be detrimental to some patients simply because their spiritual needs are religious in nature. Equally, including religious perspectives for atheists would be inconclusive. Hence spiritual needs consist of more than those associated with religious worship and are highly individual for each patient.

The predominant theme of spirituality is meaning and purpose in life. For many patients this could mean their family, significant people in their lives, friendships, life achievements, their career, anything they consider sacred or anything of which they are proud.

When addressing spiritual needs, it is essential to take a genuine interest in the patient as a person, show concern and kindness, have empathy with them, take the time to listen and respect their point of view. Some patients may find it difficult to express spiritual concerns and use questions such as:

- Is there an afterlife?
- What happens when I die?
- Is there a reason to live and can influence health (Wilding, 2007).

TABLE 1. FEATURES OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Relating to spirit or soul</td>
<td>- An institutionalised or personal belief system relating to the divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Referring to those things that are sacred, rather than material</td>
<td>- A system of strongly held beliefs and practices that follow a moral code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quest to understand the true meaning of life</td>
<td>- Worship of a god or gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Desire to integrate with that which is transcendental or sacred</td>
<td>- May include a set of narratives, symbols and practices that give meaning to the individual's experiences of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relating to interconnectivity</td>
<td>- Compliance with ritual celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- May or may not arise from or lead to community formation</td>
<td>- Obedience to a power considered to have control over human providence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- May or may not comply with ritual celebration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No affiliation with any particular religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- How will my children manage without a mother/father?
- Who will look after my business while I am in hospital?
- Who will care for my elderly parents?

Gentle enquiry into what is wrong may provide patients with an opportunity to discuss any worries. Non-verbal actions can also indicate whether they have anxieties or concerns. An example of how spiritual needs may be expressed and addressed is illustrated in case study 1 (Box 2).

Religion is much easier to define and most sources agree that it is “belief in worship of or obedience to a supernatural power considered to be divine or to have control over human destiny” (Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1995).

Table 1 highlights some of the differences between religion and spirituality, although the lists show that the terms are also interconnected. The most obvious difference between spirituality and religion is the religious belief in the divine and worship of and obedience to an all seeing, all powerful, all controlling god or set of gods.

WHY ARE SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION IMPORTANT?

In a culturally diverse and multi-faith society, spirituality is highly subjective and means different things to different people. It gives meaning to life, provides hope, gives a reason to live and can influence health (Wilding, 2007).

There is mounting evidence to show that spirituality and religion play a critical role in how patients cope with illness. In a meta-analysis of more than 1,200 published studies on religion, spirituality and health, substantial evidence was found to support the idea that spiritual and religious beliefs are used to cope with illness and result in positive outcomes (Koenig et al, 2001).