



# European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

Newsletter July 2008

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## Editorial

### Dear colleagues, dear friends

We started this newsletter in January 2006 with the aim, to promote a European Network of researchers and clinicians being involved in the field. We are pleased to recognize that the European Network is growing and moving forward. The 1<sup>st</sup> European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health was a beautiful illustration of this fact. I encourage you to read the summary written by Peter Heusser in this newsletter. Speakers and participants of eleven European countries contributed to a high quality, interdisciplinary program. An audio-CD will be produced with all the lectures (and some of the slides). It can be ordered on the conference website [www.rsh08.eu](http://www.rsh08.eu).

The European Conference was also a platform to discuss future perspectives – in personal conversations as well as in a plenary session at the end of the conference. You will find a summary of the discussion later in this newsletter. It would be great to get your feedbacks and comments in order to develop a European perspective on Religion, Spirituality and Health supported by as many of you as possible.

*René Hefti, M.D.*

## Topic

### 1<sup>st</sup> European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health

The European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health that took place at the University of Bern from May 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> was the first of its kind, and it was a complete success.

The congress was initiated by the Research Institute for Spirituality and Health

RISH in Langenthal and the Institute of Complementary Medicine KIKOM (Department of Anthroposophic Medicine) at the University of Bern, organized in cooperation from additional institutions: Department of Neurology, Institute of Psychology and Institute of Practical Theology, University of Bern, and Department for Nursing Care, University of Applied Sciences, Aarau, Switzerland.

The welcome address was given by the Dean of the Medical Faculty in Bern, Prof. Martin Täuber, and then key note lectures were held by international experts in the field: Prof. Niels Hvidt, University of Southern Denmark, spoke about Theological Perspectives in Religion and Health Research, concerning origins and impact of healthy and unhealthy representations of god, especially in relation to human suffering or theodicy, a dimension of great importance since the atrocities of the 20th century. In Europe and the Birth of Science in Spirituality Dr. Peter Heusser, University of Bern, showed how Anthroposophy as a spiritual science evolved as an extension of natural science in the European history of science and how it is applied in modern medicine. In Religion, Spirituality and Neuroscience Prof. Jean-Marc Burgunder, University of Bern, showed that modern neurogenetics and functional brain studies cannot reduce the spiritual entity of the human being to physical brain events. Prof. Arndt Büssing, University of Witten/Herdecke, Germany demonstrated with empirical data that the Role of Religion and Spirituality in Medical Patients mainly lays their impact on life satisfaction. Drs. Sebastian Murken and Christian Zwingmann summarized findings about Religion and Coping in Cancer Patients and provided evidence that the effect of religious coping on psychosocial outcomes is mediated by nonreligious coping, namely depressive and non-active problem focused coping. Based on qualitative research, Dr. Donina Baldacchino, Uni-

versity of Malta, made clear how Competencies for Spiritual Care strongly depend on personal spirituality of health care professionals, supported by qualified education in spiritual care dimensions. In a public lecture, Prof. Harold Koenig from Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA gave a Recent Overview on Religion, Spirituality and Health Research which made clear that in the last decade religion and spirituality have begun to become issues of rapidly growing importance in medical research. Dr. Stephan Huber, Ruhr-University Bochum, explained The Multidimensional Structure of Religiosity, a taxonomic model which interconnects principles of religiosity from sociology (on the general form of religiosity), psychology (on personal relevance of religiosity), and theology (on contents of religiosity) and demonstrated cross-cultural comparisons based on the model. PD Dr. Philippe Huguelet, University of Geneva, showed evidence that Integrating Spirituality into Schizophrenic Care may provide help for the recovery of schizophrenia patients proposed spiritual assessments for that purpose. Finally, Dr. Arjan Braam, University of Utrecht, provided data that emotional aspects of religiousness, which depend on the image of God, have a strong relationship with vulnerability to depression, independent of institutional religious affiliation.

Furthermore, eight parallel symposia on differentiated topics concerning the role of religion and spirituality in nursing practice, patient-physician relationships, cardiovascular, neuropsychiatric or oncological diseases or specific aspects of health care practice as well as on tools for assessing religiosity and spirituality allowed for presentations and discussion in smaller groups of professionals. Free communications and poster presentations provided ample space for presentation of research projects.

It was a very interesting, vivid conference with a high quality of its presentations



and a good atmosphere in its transdisciplinary discussions and personal encounters between representatives from diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds, enlivened also through an excellent musical evening and a well organized social program.

We already look forward to the continuation: the 2nd European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health in Bern 2010!

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## Forum

### Future Perspectives on Religion, Spirituality and Health in Europe

It was one of the aims of the 1<sup>st</sup> European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health to develop common future perspectives for Europe. The conference was an ideal platform to gather ideas and visions of the different exponents in the field. In a plenary session at the end of the conference the main ideas have been summarized and discussed.

1. Further developing the Network: continuing with the regular newsletter, building an interactive web-platform and thinking about a European Board or a European Society of Religion, Spirituality and Health (membership, annual meetings, coordinating activities, promoting research, integrating National and International Societies, e.g.

Danish Society <http://tro-helbred.org>,  
American Society [www.societysth.org](http://www.societysth.org)).

2. Organizing regular meetings and conferences similar to the European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health: giving overviews on relevant topics (keynote lectures, symposia's), offering opportunities to present and discuss new research findings, building relationships among researchers and research groups. Upcoming events see announcements.
3. Constituting working groups on specific topics. Already existing groups are: TASK (Transdisziplinäre Arbeitsgruppe Spiritualität und Krankheit), DGTP (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Transpersonale Psychologie) and others. We are happy to inform the readers of the newsletter about new working groups.
4. Establishing training opportunities for junior researchers: PhD-programs (e.g. Odense/Denmark, Oslo/Norway, Northampton/Great Britain, others), research work-shops (e.g. Research Workshop with Prof. Harold Koenig, Langenthal/ Switzerland 2005, 2008, 2010 (?), see Research Institute for Spirituality and Health, [www.rish.ch](http://www.rish.ch))

As a result of the plenary discussion the most urgent projects are the realization of an interactive web-platform and the constitution of a European Board on Religion, Spirituality and Health. Due to my opinion the two projects belong together.

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## Announcements

### Spiritualität und Medizin

September, 10/11, 2008

Bad Tölz, Germany

This is the constitutive meeting of the "Transdisziplinäre Arbeitsgruppe Spiritualität und Krankheit (TASK)".

Information: [www.geocities.com/arbuess/TASK.html](http://www.geocities.com/arbuess/TASK.html)

### Schuld & Gefühl: Religiosität in Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie

Oktober, 11, 2008

Graz, Austria

Organisation: Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik Graz, [www.rpp2008.org](http://www.rpp2008.org)

Contact: Sabine Schröttner, [info@rpp2008.org](mailto:info@rpp2008.org)

### 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)

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

2010

Bern, Switzerland

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