**Dawn Hawthorne Bio**

My area of research interest is the use of spirituality as a coping strategy for parents of infants/children who have died in the neonatal and pediatric intensive care unit (NICU/PICU) and also the use of spiritual coping practices to mitigate the mental health challenges in parents of very low-birthweight infants throughout their infants’ stay in the NICU. I became interested in spirituality as a coping strategy during my many years of working at a NICU. I recognized that parents of premature/sick neonates experienced significant stress and anxiety during their infants’ NICU stay. I observed many parents use of spiritual practices as a coping strategy. These spiritual practices were related to the parents’ race/ethnicity and religious affiliation. To gain a greater understanding of NICU nurses perception of their spirituality and the support given to parents’ use of spiritual activities, I conducted my first research project titled “Spiritual Care Practices of Neonatal Nurses”. This research study found that nurses who identified themselves as connected to self, others and the environment (spirituality) would be better able to support NICU parents in their spiritual practices.

During my PhD studies I found very few studies that focused on the differences in bereaved parents’ use of spirituality as a coping strategy by racial/ethnic and/or religion groups for NICU/PICU death. This quantitative study allowed me to focus on religious/spiritual practices of different racial/ethnic and religion groups for NICU/PICU deaths and to examine the relationship between spiritual coping practices and grief, and mental health and personal growth for bereaved parents at one and three months post death.

As a New Investigator my research trajectory is to describe the challenges associated with the death of an infant of ethnically diverse bereaved parents, approaches used to resolve the challenges and to create a bereavement intervention to help other parents who have suffered the loss of an infant.

Future research will include a randomized control trial longitudinal study that test the bereavement intervention with a larger sample of racial/ethnical bereaved parents to determine the effectiveness of the bereavement intervention on parents’ grief responses, affective mood/ mental health, family adjustment and supportive resources.

Additionally, future studies will also include a longitudinal study to identify changes in parents of very low birth-weight (VLBW) infants use of spiritual coping practices (SCPs), mental health symptoms and uncertainty of the newborn illness in the NICU and to test the relationships between use of SCPs by parents of VLBW infants and  their mental health symptoms throughout their infant’s hospitalization controlling for social support.

I have advanced my scholarship with publication of my dissertation and multiple podium and poster presentations prior to and after graduation on the effect of spiritual coping on bereaved parents grief symptoms, mental health and personal growth.