

## **EXPERT PANEL DEVELOPS EVIDENCE-BASED SCOPE OF PRACTICE TO GUIDE QUALITY SPIRITUAL CARE IN HEALTH CARE**

HealthCare Chaplaincy Network-Led Effort on Competencies Comes on Heels of Release of Spiritual Care Quality Indicators

**NEW YORK, NY (March 16, 2016)**– HealthCare Chaplaincy Network (HCCN) today released the first evidence-based scope of practice, or set of competencies, for professional chaplaincy, giving spiritual care specialists, other providers and administrators a framework in which to provide quality spiritual care in health care settings.

The recommendations build on HCCN’s release last month of the first comprehensive evidence-based quality indicators for spiritual care, and suggested metrics and measures for each. The 18 indicators include reducing spiritual distress, increasing client satisfaction, and facilitating meaning-making for clients and family members.

With the quality indicators as a reference point, the new document describes a scope of practice and associated competencies that should be attained by all professional health care chaplains. The scope of practice articulates how chaplains can help their organizations meet these indicators and “effectively and reliably produce quality spiritual care,” according to the document.

While chaplains are considered the spiritual care specialists in health care settings, the emergence of the competencies impacts overall spiritual care and other disciplines, and, ultimately, patients and their families.

Both new documents reflect HCCN’s continuing efforts to fill gaps in the delivery of spiritual care, increase the integration of professional chaplaincy on health care teams, and raise the overall level of care these teams provide. They were developed by separate consensus panels composed of prominent experts in spiritual care, palliative care and other disciplines from the U.S. and abroad.

“These long-awaited and robust tools work in tandem to move forward the field of spiritual care and professional chaplaincy,” said Rev. Eric J. Hall, HCCN’s president and CEO. “They send a loud message about how spiritual care can be fully integrated into health care, and provide the path for administrators, clinical teams, spiritual care providers, and others to seamlessly achieve that goal.”

Representing its potential impact, one quality indicator calls for all clients to be offered the opportunity to have a discussion of religious/spiritual concerns. The scope of practice for that indicator requires that the chaplain “supports and advocates for the establishment of timely and documented spiritual screening to discover and refer clients for discussion of religious/spiritual concerns; and provides timely response to all referrals and facilitates discussions of religious/spiritual concerns.”

There is a growing body of research showing patients’ desire for spiritual care when they are ill or dying, and the impact of such support on important medical outcomes, costs, and the patient experience. Spiritual care is a vital component of whole person care, and is increasingly being incorporated into palliative and hospice care as well as into treatment plans for various diseases.

“These guidelines provide a framework for consistent, evidence-based care that is both deeply human and compassionate,” said Joanne Cacciatore, Ph.D., an associate professor at Arizona State University specializing in traumatic death, and a member of the scope of practice panel.

The panel said it is intended that the scope of practice “will invite and inform the conversations around changes to chaplaincy education and training and become the basis for certification and credentialing processes with the ultimate goal of providing care recipients internationally with demonstrably reliable, high quality care to help meet their spiritual needs and support their spiritual strengths.”

The panel said while the document applies to all professional health care chaplains, investigation should continue on the utility of competencies for different levels of practice and different specialty settings. In addition, as the list of quality indicators expands over time, the scope of practice will need to expand.

For the complete scope of practice document, as well as the quality indicators document, visit [www.healthcarechaplaincy.org/research](http://www.healthcarechaplaincy.org/research).

### **About HealthCare Chaplaincy Network™**

HealthCare Chaplaincy Network™ is a global health care nonprofit organization founded in 1961 that offers spiritual-related information and resources, and professional chaplaincy services in hospitals, other health care settings, and online. Its mission is to advance the integration of spiritual care in health care through clinical practice, research and education in order to improve patient experience and satisfaction and to help people faced with illness and grief find comfort and meaning—whoever they are, whatever they believe, wherever they are. For more information, visit [www.healthcarechaplaincy.org](http://www.healthcarechaplaincy.org), call 212-644-1111, and connect with us on twitter and Facebook.

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