

Figure 1

### Consensus Statement: The Role of the Chaplain in Health Care

The chaplain is the spiritual care specialist on the health care team. They support patients, families, their caregivers and staff to draw on their spiritual, religious, emotional, and cultural resources, as well as their personal values to cope with their experiences in the health care context. They are unique and essential members of the interdisciplinary team with the goal of providing person-centered care.

The role and qualifications of health care chaplains in the United States have evolved significantly in recent decades. Originally, chaplains focused on providing religious interventions to those who could not access their own resources and were peripheral to the health care teams. However, the ever-evolving world of health care, including the increasing appreciation for the role of religion and spirituality, requires a professional spiritual care provider who can address complex spiritual, religious, emotional, ethical and existential needs that often produce spiritual distress and when properly addressed can promote health.

It is clear that spiritual distress can arise from such issues as a lack of meaning or purpose, isolation from one's community and/or sense of the sacred, feelings of injustice, indignity, disrespect for personal/communal/cultural values, or a heightened sense of their own mortality. Unaddressed spiritual distress can lead to inappropriate use of health care resources, increased symptoms, reduced quality of life and reduced patient and family satisfaction. Chaplains have become the spiritual care specialists<sup>1</sup> fully integrated into health care teams who focus on dealing with these issues. Yet there is wide variation in practice and no widely supported consensus statement clearly defining the role and qualifications of these health care chaplains.

<sup>1</sup> Spirituality is recognized as a fundamental aspect of compassionate, patient and family-centered care. "Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred."  
Puchalski C, Ferrell B, Virani R et al. Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care: The Report of the Consensus Conference. *J Palliat Med.* 2009;12(10):885-904. doi:10.1089/jpm.2009.0142

This consensus statement was developed by a panel of chaplains and health care leaders from a wide range of spiritual traditions and health care related contexts. For a list of panel members see Addendum 1. The panel hopes that this statement will serve as a guide to health care chaplains and those who support them to promote the full integration of professional chaplains into health care. This statement is a call to action for greater commitment to the role of chaplaincy. It describes what fully trained professional chaplains can, and are trained to,

contribute to health care institutions and those they serve. This statement is meant to be aspirational rather than a description of the current status across all settings April 22, 2022

Who is a professional health care chaplain?

The professional health care chaplain has master's level education in an academic field related to chaplaincy care and has completed formal clinical training in chaplaincy care. The chaplain is accountable to a code of ethics that includes a commitment to appropriate professional boundaries and respect for the values and beliefs of those for whom they care. A professional chaplain has a command of a core knowledge base and array of spiritual-care competencies, including the ability to draw on the chaplain's own spirituality. Board-certified chaplains have demonstrated advanced training, knowledge and skill according to a spiritual care standard and may have additional specialty certification, e.g., in hospice and palliative care.

The role of health care chaplains is unique and essential. They provide evidence-based spiritual care and support the continued development of evidence-based practice. They provide evidence-based assessment, counseling and advocacy. They support patients, families, caregivers and staff, irrespective of their faith tradition or spirituality, who experience spiritual, emotional, existential or moral distress or who want support and compassionate caring to promote resilience and health. They support ethical decision making. The chaplain is also a psychosocial-care generalist and collaborates with social workers and other mental-health experts to provide unified psychosocial-spiritual care.

As the essential, fully integrated spiritual care specialist on the care team, the chaplain develops and documents a spiritual care plan, provides input during clinical team rounds, educates clinical colleagues in generalist spiritual care, establishes comprehensive referral processes in response to spiritual distress and supports the spiritual well-being of team members both as professionals and persons. Chaplains often focus their care on high acuity and high-volume patient care areas but are also increasingly present in outpatient and telehealth settings.

Chaplains contribute beyond the care of individuals and families to support the institutional commitment to person centered compassionate care practices and policies at all levels of the organization. They support effective, efficient, and ethical use of institutional resources and serve as institutional liaisons to community spiritual and faith groups. They actively support institutional values such as dignity, respect, and equity and work to facilitate the institution welcoming patients, families, and staff of all cultures, races, religions/spirituality, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, generations, disabilities, languages, nationalities, and immigration statuses.

As spiritually based clinicians, leaders, educators, and advocates, professional health care chaplains champion caring for the whole person at the individual, team and system levels.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the National Consensus Project Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care, 4th ed, 2018.

For Information, please contact  
George Handzo  
212-644-1111 Ext. 113  
ghandzo@healthcarechaplains.org

## Appendix

The following are stakeholders and members of the panel who have agreed to have their names attached as supporters of this document. Additional supporters are welcome.

Rev, Ty Alday  
CEO  
Institute for Clinical Training  
Orlando, FL

Chaplain (Colonel) Mark Allison, MA., MBCC  
President, World Spiritual Health Organization  
Salt Lake City, Utah

\*Tracy A. Balboni MD, MPH, FAAHPM  
Dana-Farber/Brigham and Women's Cancer Center  
Harvard Medical School  
Boston, MA

\*Chaplain Melissa Bennett, M.Div. (she/her)  
Umatilla, Nimiipuu, Sac & Fox, Anishinaabe  
Behavioral Health Aide Project Director  
Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board  
Portland, OR

\*Joel Nightingale Berning, MDiv, BCC, ACPE  
Manager  
Pastoral Care & Education Department  
New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center  
New York, NY

Rev. Margie Bowers-Atkinson, DMin, BCC  
System Director Spiritual and Palliative Care  
BayCare Health System  
Clearwater, Fl.

\*Rev. Dr. Danielle J. Buhuro,  
Executive Director  
& ACPE Certified Educator

Sankofa CPE Center, LLC

\*Sarah Byrne-Martelli, DMin BCC-PCHAC  
Palliative Care Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Boston MA

Rev. Jim Denley  
Military and Veterans Affairs Endorser  
General Council of the Assemblies of God  
Columbia, MO

\*Dr. D.W. Donovan, D.Bioethics, MA, MS, BCC  
Board Certified Chaplain

\*Rev. Guillermo Escalona, M.Div, BCC, CT  
Director of Pastoral Care  
Miami Cancer Institute  
Baptist Health South Florida  
Miami, Florida

\*Torrie Fields, MPH  
Principal  
TF Analytics  
San Luis Obispo, CA

\*Chaplain Bruce Feldstein MD, BCC  
Director, Jewish Chaplaincy Services serving Stanford Medicine, a program of Jewish Family and  
Children's Services  
Adjunct Clinical Professor, Stanford School of Medicine,  
Stanford, California.

\*Betty Ferrell PhD, FAAN, FPCN  
Professor and Director Nursing Research  
City of Hope Med Ctr  
Duarte, CA

The Rev. David Fleenor, STM, BCC, ACPE  
Manager of Clinical Pastoral Education  
Stony Brook University Hospital  
Stony Brook, NY

Emily Fowler MDiv, BCC  
Women/Pediatric Chaplain

Stonybrook Medicine  
Stony Brook, NY

Rev. Joan Jiko Halifax  
Abbot  
Upaya Zen Center  
Santa Fe, NM

\*Rev. Eric Hall, DTh, APBCC  
President & CEO  
HealthCare Chaplaincy Network  
New York, NY

\*George Handzo, APBCC, M.Div (Convenor)  
Director, Health Services Research & Quality  
HealthCare Chaplaincy Network  
New York, NY

\*Rev. Lavender Kelley, M.Div., BCC-APC  
Chaplaincy Services  
Children's National Hospital  
Washington, DC

\*Imam Yusuf Hasan, BCC  
Chaplain  
New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer  
Center  
New York, NY

Rev. Brian P. Hughes, APBCC, BCC  
Chaplain  
United Health Care

\*Allison Kestenbaum, MA, MPA, BCC-PCHAC, ACPE Certified Educator  
Supervisor of Spiritual Care & Clinical Pastoral Education  
UC San Diego Health  
San Diego, CA

\*Robert Kidd, MDiv, BCC  
Former System Director, Spiritual Care and Values Integration  
Houston Methodist  
Houston, Texas

Chaplain Jeff Lee, DMin, BCC, LMFT

Chair, San Diego Employee Whole Health Committee  
VA San Diego Healthcare System (008)  
Chaplain Service  
San Diego, CA

Deborah B. Marin, MD  
George and Marion Blumenthal Professor of Psychiatry  
Director Ombuds Office  
Director Center for Spirituality and Health  
Director Center for Stress, Resilience and Personal Growth  
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai  
New York, New York

The Rev. Margaret A. Muncie, M. Div., BCC  
Clinical Director  
Healthcare Chaplaincy Network  
New York, NY

\*Rev. Kevin Massey, BCC  
System Vice President, Mission and Spiritual Care  
Advocate Aurora Health  
Downers Grove, IL

\*Rev. Matt Norvell, DMin., BCC  
Pediatric Chaplain and Clinical Manager  
Johns Hopkins Hospital  
Baltimore, Maryland

Brent Peery, DMin, BCC (he/him)  
Vice President for Chaplaincy Services  
Memorial Hermann Health System  
Houston, Texas

\*Karen Pugliese, MA, BCC-PCHAC  
Advanced Practice Chaplain  
Spiritual Care and Education  
Northwestern Medicine, Central DuPage Hospital  
Winfield IL

\*Mary Remington, Chaplain  
Director of Spiritual Care  
Good Samaritan Hospital  
Suffern, NY  
Director of Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program

Upaya Zen Center  
Santa Fe. NM

\*Reb Naomi Tzril Saks, MA, MDiv, BCC  
Palliative Care Chaplain  
Division of Palliative Medicine and Department of Spiritual Care Services  
University of California, San Francisco  
San Francisco, CA

\*Rev. Satoe Soga, DMin., MDiv., BCC  
ACPE Certified Educator  
Houston Methodist Hospital  
Houston, Texas

Tracy A. Schroepfer, PhD, MSW, MA  
Professor  
Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Madison, WI

Rev. Sue Wintz, M.Div APBCC, BCC  
Director of Education  
HealthCare Chaplaincy Network  
New York, NY.

\*Jason A. Wolf, Ph.D., CPXP  
President & CEO  
The Beryl Institute  
Founding Editor Patient Experience Journal

Figure 1: Consensus Statement: The Role of the Chaplain in Health Care