

## THE FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF PROFESSIONAL HEALTHCARE CHAPLAINS



The activities of professional chaplains include diverse interactions with patients and families, professional staff, volunteers, and community members. While no one chaplain can or need perform every function, they can be classified as follows:

1. When religious beliefs and practices are tightly interwoven with cultural contexts, chaplains constitute a powerful reminder of the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling power of religious faith.
2. Professional chaplains reach across faith group boundaries and do not proselytize. Acting on behalf of their institutions, they also seek to protect patients from being confronted by other, unwelcome, forms of spiritual intrusion.
3. They provide supportive spiritual care through empathic listening, demonstrating an understanding of persons in distress. Typical activities include:
  - Grief and loss care
  - Risk screening – identifying individuals whose religious/spiritual conflicts may compromise recovery or satisfactory adjustment
  - Facilitation of spiritual issues related to organ/tissue donation
  - Crisis intervention/Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
  - Spiritual assessment
  - Communication with caregivers
  - Facilitation of staff communication
  - Conflict resolution among staff members, patients, and family members
  - Referral and linkage to internal and external resources
  - Assistance with decision making and communication regarding decedent affairs
  - Staff support relative to personal crises or work stress
  - Institutional support during organizational change or crisis

4. Professional chaplains serve as members of patient care teams by:

- Participation in medical rounds and patient care conferences, offering perspectives on the spiritual status of patients
- Participation in interdisciplinary education
- Charting spiritual care interventions in medical charts

5. Professional chaplains design and lead religious ceremonies of worship and ritual such as:

- Prayer, meditation, and reading of holy texts
- Worship and observance of holy days
- Blessings and sacraments
- Memorial services and funerals
- Rituals at the time of birth or other significant times of life cycle transition
- Holiday observances

6. Professional chaplains lead or participate in healthcare ethics programs by:

- Assisting patients and families in completing advance directives
- Clarifying value issues with patients, family members, staff and the organization
- Participating in Ethics Committees and Institutional Review Boards
- Consulting with staff and patients about ethical concerns
- Pointing to human value aspects of institutional policies and behaviors
- Conducting in-service education

7. Professional chaplains educate the healthcare team and community regarding the relationship of religious and spiritual issues to institutional services in the following ways:

- Interpreting and analyzing multi-faith and multi-cultural traditions as they impact clinical services
- Making presentations concerning spirituality and health issues
- Training of community religious representatives regarding the institutional procedures for effective visitation
- Training and supervising volunteers from religious communities who can provide spiritual care to the sick
- Conducting professional clinical education programs for seminarians, clergy, and religious leaders
- Developing congregational health ministries
- Educating students in the healthcare professions regarding the interface of religion and spirituality with medical care



8. Professional chaplains act as mediator and reconciler, functioning in the following ways for those who need a voice in the healthcare system:

- 🌟 As advocates or "cultural brokers" between institutions and patients, family members, and staff
- 🌟 Clarifying and interpreting institutional policies to patients, community clergy, and religious organizations
- 🌟 Offering patients, family members and staff an emotionally and spiritually "safe" professional from whom they can seek counsel or guidance
- 🌟 Representing community issues and concerns to the organization

9. Professional chaplains may serve as contact persons to arrange assessment for the appropriateness and coordination of complementary therapies.

Patients increasingly demonstrate interest in healing from many sources not represented within the traditional healthcare disciplines. Many of these complementary healing traditions are grounded in the world's religious traditions and chaplains may utilize or make a referral for complementary therapies such as:

- 🌟 Guided imagery/relaxation training
- 🌟 Meditation
- 🌟 Music therapy
- 🌟 Healing touch



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10. Professional chaplains and their certifying organizations encourage and support research activities to assess the effectiveness of providing spiritual care.

While many chaplains serve in settings with little interest in conducting research, others are employed by centers with a research mission.

Increasingly, chaplains attend to research in the following ways:

- 🌟 Developing spiritual assessment and spiritual risk screening tools
- 🌟 Developing tools for benchmarking productivity and staffing patterns that seek to increase patient and family satisfaction
- 🌟 Conducting interdisciplinary research with investigators in allied fields, publishing results in medical, psychological, and chaplaincy journals
- 🌟 Promoting research in spiritual care at national conventions