

Spiritual Care, the Health Care System, and.... Choirs?

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When I mentioned to a friend that I was writing an article on spiritual care (in health care) for the Prairie Messenger, the immediate reply was, "Well, *that's* preaching to the choir!" This got me thinking that he may be right, so, dear choir... let's see how you do on a pop quiz!

1. True or False: Spiritual Care is only for religious people. (F)

All human beings have physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects to their personhood and all can experience brokenness in any of these aspects. Quality spiritual care helps all people to cope with spiritual crises in their lives and is for anyone who desires it. Issues of meaning and purpose, life and death, dependence and autonomy, suffering and healing, significance and belonging are among the many issues that impact the spiritual well-being of individuals. Spiritual care helps people to meet these crises, and only has specific religious expression if it is desired by the care recipient.

2. True or False: Spiritual Care providers do not proselytize, and do not have an agenda for their care recipients. (T)

Quality spiritual care consists of a ministry of presence and listening to the recipient's story - the recipient sets the agenda. Spiritual care providers journey with the recipient and help them to cope with their issues and concerns. It may involve advocacy for the recipient within the health care system, helping the recipient come to terms with the faith issues they define as important to them, or perhaps helping them to re-connect with their traditional faith communities.

3. True or False: Spiritual care professionals are not needed in the health care system, as social workers and nurses cover the same areas of need. (F)

Spiritual care deals with some similar area of concern that both social workers and nurses encounter in their work. However, spiritual well being often deals with the sense of self, personal values and beliefs, and the meaning and purpose of life. In other words, it often moves from the secular world into the sacred sphere. Spiritual care professionals are trained and certified by their academic qualifications and respective faith communities to assist people as they cope with these challenges.

4. True or False: Chaplain/employees and other spiritual care employees of the health care system are members of the "Circle of Care" and participate as equal partners in the care team. (T)

Chaplain/employees and spiritual care employees of the system are fully accountable to the health care system, and are a part of the "circle of care". In most instances, they do have access to charts, are considered part of the care team, and do bring their specialized expertise, advocating for the care recipients in their cultural diversity, and participating fully in team decisions about care options.

5. True or False: Our health care system attempts to respond sensitively and effectively to the diversity of religious and cultural practices of health care recipients. (T)

Our health care providers do try to ensure that religious and cultural practices of recipients are respected in the provision of care, but we are new to the growing diversity of our population and need to improve in this area of care. Language interpretation and knowledge about cultural preferences and practices are often problematical and can impact quality of care. Spiritual care providers specialize in awareness of multi-faith needs and can assist the system to adapt and accommodate.

6. True or False: We can no longer leave the provision of spiritual care in the health care system solely to the faith communities. (T)

At present, only about half of those admitted into acute care indicate a faith connection and are then able to receive some spiritual care from volunteers or clergy of their own faith tradition. Similarly, long-term care facilities suffer from the same lack of spiritual care providers. Many denominations have begun to cut back on spiritual care services in health care due to shortage of funds. This gap invites the health care system to ensure that anyone who wants and needs spiritual care can access it and do so according to their own cultural and faith traditions.

7. True or False: Spiritual care is a nice frill in the health system, but is too costly. (F)

The provision of quality spiritual care is cost effective, as studies demonstrate it reduces the length of hospital stays, aids in recovery and pain management and reduces the possibility of relapse. Moreover, spiritual care providers support staff who may be in spiritual crises of their own, potentially helping to alleviate burn out and reducing sick time.

So, choir members, how did you do?

6 - 7 correct: Wow, you're in line for a solo!

3 - 5 correct: Keep singing, you know your part!

0 - 2 correct: You're off key today, maybe your sheet music is upside down...

Catholic health care strongly supports the need for spiritual care providers - both professionals and volunteers alike. Once again our Gospel values and story of the Good Samaritan guide our healing actions to serve the physical and spiritual needs of all. We stand solidly in the tradition from which we have received our inspiration, and serve with an attitude of respect for people of all faiths, or no faith.

(Quiz adapted from 'Myths & Truths' developed by Spiritual Care Saskatchewan, 2010.)