



Tell Congress That Spiritual Care Matters

In health care, spiritual care matters—to patients, to families, to health care providers, and to health care settings. It is increasingly being recognized as a vital component of whole-person care. Its integration into interdisciplinary health care teams has been gaining ground across the continuum of care, especially palliative and hospice care. Patients are playing a much more proactive role in the health care they receive, and patient-centered care requires the entire team to consider spirituality in deciding how to best optimize a patient's quality of life.

A significant body of evidence supports the efficacy of spiritual care as a value-added service in health care:

- Patients, across clinical settings, consistently state they have spiritual struggles or needs. Yet, in one study 72 percent of patients said they received minimal or no support from the medical team.
- A positive relationship exists between spirituality and health and well-being. Patients turn to their spiritual beliefs and resources as a coping mechanism in the face of illness. Spiritual support can enhance pain management, protect against depression, and reduce risk of substance abuse and suicide.
- There is a correlation between spiritual support and patient satisfaction. Patients whose spiritual needs have not been adequately addressed are more likely to have lower levels of satisfaction with and perception of quality of care. Patients receiving a chaplain visit are more satisfied with their overall care. Addressing spiritual concerns also serves to increase trust in the medical team.
- Spiritual support has the potential to directly impact cost of care and an organization's bottom-line. Patients who receive less than adequate spiritual support spend less time in hospice and have more aggressive, more costly care in the intensive care unit. Providing chaplaincy services is related to lower rates of death in the hospital and higher rates of hospice enrollment.

Authoritative bodies emphasize inclusion of spiritual care:

- The Joint Commission requires that all patients be assessed in order to ascertain religious affiliation and any spiritual practices or beliefs that have the potential to impact their care. It concludes that the "emotional and spiritual experience of hospitalization remains a prime opportunity for QI (Quality Improvement)."
- The Institute of Medicine states that frequent assessment of a patient's spiritual well-being and attention to a patient's spiritual and religious needs should be among the core components of quality end-of-life care across all settings and providers.
- The National Consensus Project for Quality Palliative Care Clinical Practice Guidelines calls for a board certified chaplain to be a member of the health care team, especially in palliative care.
- The American Medical Association's House of Delegates adopted a policy recognizing "the importance of individual patient spirituality and its impact on health and encourages patient access to spiritual care services."

Patients and family members speak to the merits of spiritual support, including speaking with a professional chaplain:

- *“Without someone to talk with, my health problems seemed overwhelming. I am so glad I found you because talking with you has eased my burden.”*
- *“I cannot imagine where I would be today if I had not been able to tell you my story, just getting it out helped ease my emotional stress.”*
- *“I was so terrified that my daughter’s cancer would take her from me that I was unable to make decisions about her care. I am so glad that you were there to listen and help me find a way to go forward.”*

Given this, we urge Congress to recognize spiritual care as a key aspect of whole-person health care; and to support and facilitate expanded access to optimal spiritual care and resources across health care settings. For current and future patients and their families, and the health care professionals and settings they rely on, it matters.

Please sign our petition and participate in this unified call for enhanced spiritual care.

www.change.org/p/tell-congress-that-spiritual-care-matters

**This petition was started by
Spiritual Care Association/HealthCare Chaplaincy Network/March 2017**

For more information, read HealthCare Chaplaincy Network’s white paper, “SPIRITUAL CARE: What It Means, Why It Matters in Health Care” at www.healthcarechaplaincy.org/spiritualcare

