All professions and associations have an obligation to articulate its basic values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. The Spiritual Care Association Code of Ethics sets forth these values, principles and standards to guide members’ conduct within their provision of care as spiritual care professionals and providers. This code is relevant to all members regardless of their professional functions the settings in which they work, or the populations they serve.

The primary mission of spiritual care is to enhance human well-being by providing care to persons in physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, or social need in diverse settings. “Persons” is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families groups, organizations, and communities. A historic and defining feature of spiritual care is the profession’s focus on individual spiritual well-being as well as within a social context of participation in community and society. Fundamental to spiritual care is attention to the issues of spiritual strength and distress that create, contribute to, and address challenges and joys in living as it is essential to each person’s experience of health, wholeness, and meaning in life. Spiritual care professionals and providers seek to enhance the capacity of persons to identify and utilize their spiritual, religious and existential strengths, assist in accommodating practices when appropriate, and providing resources. They also seek to promote and advocate for the responsiveness of health care and other organizations, communities, and social institutions in acknowledging and incorporating the spiritual dimension of persons in the services they provide.

The mission of the profession of spiritual care is rooted in a set of core values which are the foundation of the chaplain or other spiritual care provider’s unique purpose, perspective, and contributions to human well-being.

**Dignity of and respect for the person**

Spiritual care professionals and providers are sensitive to spiritual, religious, existential, cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual-orientation and other expressions of diversity and affirm the dignity and value of each individual. Spiritual care providers strive to eliminate discrimination in all its forms and expressions.

**Competence**

Spiritual care professionals and providers who incorporate spiritual care into their practice are informed by professional education, knowledge, training, and demonstration of competence. They practice within their scope of practice and continually develop and enhance their professional expertise.
Integrity
Spiritual care professionals and providers behave in a trustworthy manner. They act honestly and responsibly both individually and as members of the organizations with which they are affiliated and employed.

Importance of human relationships
Spiritual care professionals and providers understand that relationships between and among people are important to personal and communal strength, support, and growth. They seek to engage persons as partners in the provision of spiritual care to address their challenges, joys, and needs. They seek to resolve conflicts and promote effective communication and understanding.

Ethical Standards for the Spiritual Care Association
The Spiritual Care Association promotes spiritual care as integral to the care, respect, and dignity of all persons. Its commitment to its members is the advocacy of the profession, provision of knowledge and education, demonstration of competency, and commitment to quality improvement and research. All members and supporters of the Spiritual Care Association will be treated with dignity, respect, and collegiality without discrimination.

Ethical Standards for Members

1. Ethical Responsibilities to Persons

Spiritual care professionals and providers understand persons to be any clients, patients, counselees, members of a faith/spiritual/cultural community, family members, staff, or students to whom they provide spiritual care. Spiritual care professionals and providers uphold the following standards of professional ethics:

1.1 Speak and act in ways that honor the dignity and value of every individual.

1.2 Represent their competencies, education, training, and experience relevant to their practice in an accurate manner and provide services only within the boundaries of their certification or credentials. No professional identification, degrees, certification, or credentialing should be used that is false, misleading, fraudulent, or deceptive. Specialized services, techniques, or interventions should only be represented and engaged in if the spiritual care professional or provider has the appropriate education, training, or supervised experience.

1.3 Respect and promote the rights of persons to self-determination and assist them in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals. Spiritual care professionals and providers promote the best interest of the person and foster strength, integrity, and healing. Spiritual care professionals and providers have a duty to at times limit a person’s right to self-determination when, in their professional judgement, the person’s actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others, for example when a person has abused a child or has threatened to harm self or others.
1.4 Demonstrate respect for the spiritual, religious, existential, and cultural values of those they serve and do not impose their own personal values and beliefs on those served. Proselytizing is strictly prohibited by any spiritual care professional or provider.

1.5 Understand culture and its function in human behavior, community, and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures. Spiritual care professionals and providers should have a knowledge base of cultural competence particularly that of persons they serve, and are able to demonstrate sensitivity to that culture and to differences among people and cultural groups. This includes, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual identity, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religious, spiritual, existential or no belief system, immigration status, mental or physical disability, and social indicators such as literacy, homelessness, incarceration, or income level.

1.6 Provide services and care to persons only in the context of a professional based relationship. Spiritual care professionals and providers should use clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purpose of the services, limits to services, the person’s right to refuse, and provide opportunities for persons to ask questions in order to experience informed consent. In instances when clients have difficulty understanding the primary language used in the setting, spiritual care professionals and providers should take steps to ensure comprehension, including arranging for a qualified interpreter whenever possible. When a person lacks the capacity to provide informed consent to spiritual care services, permission should be sought from an appropriate surrogate caregiver of the person, seeking to ensure that the third party acts in a manner consistent with the person’s wishes and interests.

1.7 Respect persons’ right to privacy and confidentiality. Spiritual care professionals and providers should not solicit private information from persons unless it is essential to conducting spiritual care assessment, screening, evaluation, or research. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply. Appropriate confidential information may be disclosed to other members of the professional team within the setting of care according to organizational policies in documentation and creation of a plan of care. Respect the person’s confidentiality when communicating with family members or significant others except when disclosure is required for necessary treatment, granted by the person’s permission, or for the safety of any person as required by law. All confidentiality of persons should be safeguarded when using materials for educational purposes or written publication.

1.8 Maintain relationships with persons on a professional basis only. Spiritual care professionals and providers should not take unfair advantage of any relationship or exploit others to further their own personal, religious, political, or business interests. They should engage in appropriate physical contact with persons only after setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern such physical contact.
1.9 Sexual harassment actions, both physical and verbal including misconduct, harassment, or assault, of persons by spiritual care professionals and providers is strictly prohibited by spiritual care professionals and providers.

1.10 Use of derogatory language and actions by spiritual care professionals or providers to or about persons, their beliefs or any aspect of their culture, either by verbal or written means, is strictly prohibited by spiritual care professionals and providers. Included is any kind of language or actions that are forms of harassment, coercion, intimidation, or otherwise abusive. Accurate and respectful language should be used in all communication to and about persons.

1.11 Any conflicts of interest or appearance of conflicting interest(s) should be avoided or corrected. Spiritual care professionals and providers should not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship to exploit others to further their personal, religious/spiritual, political, or business interests.

2. Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues

Spiritual care professionals and providers engage in collegial relationships with peers including other spiritual care professionals and providers, community religious, spiritual, and existential belief system leaders, cultural community elders and leaders, and those from other professional disciplines.

2.1 Colleagues and their qualifications, views, and professional obligations should be treated with respect, regard, support, and confidentiality.

2.2 Unwarranted negative criticism of colleague should be avoided in all verbal and written communications, with other colleagues, and with persons to whom care is being provided. Unwarranted criticism includes but is not limited to colleagues' level of competence or individuals' attributes such as race ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, spiritual, or existential beliefs and values, culture, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

2.3 Collegial and responsible action should be taken when concerns about or direct knowledge of incompetence, impairment, misconduct, or violations against this code arise.

2.4 Cooperation with other spiritual care professionals and providers and other professional disciplines should always be demonstrated in order to enhance the well-being of persons being served.

2.5 Participate in and contribution to decisions that affect the well-being of the persons being served will be contributed to by contributing the expertise, perspectives, and experience of the spiritual care profession. Professional and ethical obligations of the interdisciplinary team as a whole and of its individual members should be understood and respected.

2.6 Advocate for changes in their settings that honor spirituality as a key component to whole person care.
2.7 Participate in quality improvement projects and programs to enhance the provision of spiritual care services and contribute to the overall setting.

2.6 When a team decision raises ethical concerns for a spiritual care professional or provider, attempts to resolve the disagreement should be pursued through appropriate channels within the setting of care.

2.7 Understand the limits of one’s individual expertise and make referrals to other professionals when appropriate.

2.8 When evaluating the performance of colleagues, such responsibility should be fulfilled in a fair and considerate manner and on the basis of clearly stated criteria.

3. Ethical Responsibilities in Education

Those who function as educators, field instructors for students, or trainers of other professionals should provide instruction only within their areas of knowledge and competence and should provide instruction based on the most current information and knowledge available in the profession.

3.2 The educational environment will be maintained free of coercion, intimidation, harassment and with clear boundaries and respect for privacy and self-disclosure. Educators will not engage in any dual relationships with students in which there is risk of exploitation or potential harm to the student. Clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries will be established.

3.3 Students will be provided adequate, timely, and constructive feedback, with demonstration of knowledge and competency evaluated and graded in a manner that is fair and respectful.

3.4 When students are engaged in care of persons, the educator spiritual care professional or provider will ensure that persons are informed that the services are being provided by students.

4. Ethical Responsibilities in Research

Spiritual care professionals and providers promote and engage in research to contribute to the development of knowledge and best practices within the profession.

4.1 Pursue continuing education in methods of reading, understanding, and critiquing methods and conclusions of research.

4.2 Keep current with and critically examine emerging knowledge relevant to spiritual care and fully use evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice.

4.3 Engage only in research within the boundaries of their competence.
4.4 Understand and utilize ethical principles including adherence to research design and implementation, informed consent, the right to withdraw consent and involvement, confidentiality, evaluation, and the use of information and findings for professional purposes only.

4.5 Report research data and findings accurately, including conscientious attribution of sources in research and writing.

5. Ethical Responsibilities to the Spiritual Care Association

Spiritual care professionals and providers who participate in the membership community of the Spiritual Care Association commit to integrity, competence, respect, and collegiality as defined by the Code of Ethics.

5.1 Members will represent their certification or credentialing by the Spiritual Care Association in an accurate manner to employers, colleagues, and the persons whom they serve.

5.2 Members will pay their annual dues in a timely manner.

5.3 Members will complete the annual continuing educational hours as required by their standards.

References:

