

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Hospital Chaplaincy
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1. What is a Chaplain and what does he or she do?

A: A healthcare Chaplain is a professional spiritual care provider employed by a hospital or other healthcare systems who holds required ecclesiastical credentials, professional education, and membership in a national association for professional healthcare Chaplains.

A Chaplain seeks to empower individuals from diverse religions and cultures with meaning, value, purpose, and transcendent connections to God, a Supreme Being, others, and/or self, and provides spiritual care as a part of an interdisciplinary healthcare team.

Provide a powerful reminder of the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling power of religious faith.

Reach across faith boundaries and does not proselytize. Acting on behalf of their institutions, they also seek to protect patients from being confronted by other, unwelcome, forms of spiritual intrusion.

Provide supportive spiritual care through empathic listening, demonstrating an understanding of persons in distress.

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 multidisciplinary education, charting spiritual care interventions in medical charts.

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, and special holiday observances

Educate the healthcare team and community regarding the relationship of religious and spiritual issues to institutional services.

2. Are you a real minister or pastor?

A: Yes, however, Chaplains work in unique settings, with specialized training. Usually, Chaplains are ordained, licensed, or commissioned ministers and represent a specific faith group and denomination. However, some denominations recognized lay ministers with specialized training to be Chaplains. Chaplains from different faith groups, i.e. Muslim, Hindu, Christian denominations that do not recognize professional clergy may be Chaplains and not be ordained ministers. In the Foursquare Movement, we have three levels for Chaplains, Associate Chaplain (District License), International License, and Ordination.

3. Why do we need hospital Chaplains?

A: Healthcare organizations are obligated to respond to spiritual needs because patients have a right to such services.

The Joint Commission, which is the accrediting agency for healthcare organizations, states that, "Patients have a fundamental right to considerate care that safeguards their personal dignity and respects their cultural, psychosocial, and spiritual values."

Many patients and hospital staff are religious and all have spirituality

Many patients and staff depend on religion to cope with their illness and hospitalization

The religious beliefs of patients and their families may influence medical decisions

Religious beliefs of patients, families, and even staff often influence end-of-life decisions.

4. Chaplain?! Am I dying?

A: Not necessarily, what has your doctor told you? Although professional healthcare Chaplains do attend most deaths in the hospital, they do much more.

5. How do you pray for people of different denominations and faiths?

A: Chaplains do not always pray with a patient. Chaplains meet the patient and family where they are spiritually, regardless of faith group or denomination, and ministers to them from that position.

If the patient or family request prayer, the Chaplain will pray for them or if he or she is unable to pray because of a theological conflict with the patient or family's faith group or denomination, the Chaplain will refer to a spiritual caregiver from the patient's denomination or faith group.

6. How do I become a Chaplain?

A: Generally, to become a healthcare Chaplain, you will need to complete a Master of Divinity or 72 hours of graduate work in religion or equivalent field.

Have an endorsement by a denomination or faith group to represent that organization as a Chaplain

Clinical pastoral education equivalent to one year of postgraduate training in an APCE accredited program.

Complete annual continuing education requirements, and submit to a peer review every five years.

Although there are Chaplain positions that do not require this specialized training, as the profession grows, more and more hiring institutions are asking for the above standards in their Chaplain candidates.

7. God has called me to pray for people in the hospital. Why are you the Chaplain telling me I cannot do that?

A: The Joint Commission, which is the accrediting agency for healthcare organizations, states that, "Patients have a fundamental right to considerate care that safeguards their personal dignity and respects their cultural, psychosocial, and spiritual values."

The Joint Commission requires that healthcare agencies provide for the spiritual care of its patients. It also requires that Chaplains do not proselytize, and acting on behalf of their institutions, they also seek to protect patients from being confronted by other, unwelcome, forms of spiritual intrusion.

Although, you may not randomly seek out and pray for patients, you may always visit individuals from your own church, temple, synagogue, or other place of worship.

The hospital may also have a spiritual care volunteer program where, under the supervision of a Chaplain, you may be permitted to visit selected individuals in the hospital.

8. Does a Chaplain only work with patients?

A: No, healthcare Chaplains work with patients, their families and usually with the hospital staff. Many staff members do not attend a place of worship and the Chaplain becomes their pastor in a relaxed informal relationship.

9. Do you get paid to be a Chaplain?

Although many smaller community hospitals rely on volunteer clergy to be Chaplains, more and more hospitals are requiring that Chaplains have professional credentials, and pay their Chaplains for maintaining that professionalism.

10. What is CPE?

A: Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is interfaith professional education for ministry. It brings theological students and ministers of all faiths (pastors, priests, rabbis, imams and others) into supervised encounter with persons in crisis. Out of an intense involvement with persons in need, and the feedback from peers and teachers, students develop new awareness of themselves as persons and of the needs of those to whom they minister. From theological reflection on specific human situations, they gain a new understanding of ministry. Within the interdisciplinary team process of helping persons, they develop skills in inter personal and interprofessional relationships. (Quoted from the ACPE website at www.acpe.edu)

For more information about Foursquare Chaplaincy, contact us at chaplains@foursquare.org. Comments about this document are also welcome.