

What Is the Role of Spiritual Care in an Inter-Disciplinary Hospice Team?

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Just as a hospice nurse develops a plan of care with each patient and family, the spiritual care team member also works with patients and families to discover and meet their spiritual needs. What follows are some frequently asked questions about spiritual care.

1. What is the most frequent role of a spiritual care coordinator?

Many United Hospice of Rockland patients have enjoyed a long standing relationship with a faith community. However, due to their illness, advanced age, transportation barriers, dwindling friends and family, they no longer attend their former house of worship. For them, a UHR spiritual care coordinator can become a person who brings the “church” or “synagogue” to them. Often their time together involves sharing favorite liturgy, prayers, songs, hymns as well as discussions about end of life rituals, beliefs and concerns.

2. What if your spiritual care coordinator is not of your faith?

UHR’s spiritual care coordinators are similar to chaplains. While they can more easily bring their depth of knowledge to those who share their faith, they generally come to us with inter-faith experience and always with a desire to work with those of different faiths. While there are times we re-assign spiritual care coordinators, most of the time patients, families and our spiritual care coordinators carve out a “spiritual space” that works for everyone.

3. What if you have no interest getting involved with a spiritual care coordinator?

When the patient and family have a strong connection to clergy in the community, our staff, with their permission, contact community clergy and facilitate their involvement. When patients and families are not inclined to work with spiritual care coordinators, they simply need to communicate that to an inter-disciplinary team member. Because the needs of hospice patients and families change over time, spiritual care may be suggested to the patient and family from time to time to see if it can help with an emerging need.

4. Do spiritual care coordinators visit patients and families who would describe themselves as agnostics, atheists, or at odds with their faith?

Yes. Spiritual Care Coordinators view spirituality in a very inclusive way. They have learned that pondering “the meaning of life”, “finding one’s place in history”, looking for a theology which matches one’s world view, discussing core religious values like love and forgiveness, are very meaningful to individuals in their “last chapter”. In fact, these relationships are very precious to all concerned. They are unexpected surprises as well as experiences that may never have occurred without our involvement.

5. Does the spiritual care coordinator also work with family members?

Absolutely. There are many ways our spiritual care coordinators help and support families: for some end of life issues precipitate a significant loss of faith, for others it brings a renewal of faith. Some families have conflict surrounding religious rituals, some want to learn more about end of life rituals, not to mention sharing with families as well as with patients' favorite liturgy, prayers, songs and hymns. Finally, spiritual care coordinators usually attend their patient's funerals and sometimes play a role in its planning or in the service itself.

United Hospice of Rockland recently created a Spiritual Care Committee which includes community clergy. We will be endeavoring to help faith communities feel more comfortable dealing with end of life issues. If you would like us to reach out to your house of worship, please contact Bonnie Walsh at UHR (634-4974).