Will You Pray With Me, Doctor?
Exploring the Role of Religion and Spirituality Within the Medical Encounter

Spring 2018

Course Dates: January 8, 22, 29, February 5, 12, 19
Mondays, 5:00-7:00 PM

Maximum Students: 20

Class Year: MS1 and MS2

Course Director: Dena Hofkosh, M.D.
Lisa Podgurski, M.D.
Krissy Moehling, MPH

Contact Information: Dena Hofkosh, M.D.
dena.hofkosh@chp.edu

Registration: Betsy Nero, Office of Medical Education
betsy@medschool.pitt.edu

Description: Religion and spirituality (R/S) are important to a majority of patients in the context of medical care, but many medical students and physicians lack the skills to connect with patients and families regarding the influence of religion and spirituality on their health and health care decisions. In fact, the majority of Pitt medical students identify as agnostic or atheist, which may be a barrier to addressing some of the needs of patients who perceive R/S as relevant to their health care. Alternatively, some physicians who themselves have strong religious and spiritual beliefs, may find it difficult to counsel and provide care for patients especially when patients seek treatment or counsel contrary to those beliefs. We will discuss the attitude of humility as a way for allowing respectful exploration of and support for patients’ beliefs and traditions and their influence on health and health care.

This mini-elective is designed for medical students of any faith or spiritual background, including those who identify as non-religious, atheist, or agnostic. Students and faculty will explore the influence of various faith traditions on patients’ health care decisions and practice interviewing skills that will allow for conversations with patients about religion and spirituality. The intention of this mini-elective is not to make students experts in R/S traditions; rather, it proposes to equip medical students of all backgrounds with a set of tools necessary to provide R/S informed care to their patients.

Students who will benefit from this mini-elective may find themselves questioning: How do I address R/S in the medical encounter in a way that is authentic, compassionate and culturally sensitive? What is the impact of incorporating R/S informed care on key measures that drive medical care such as quality of life, patient satisfaction, and medical cost utilization? How do I approach a patient with a religious or moral belief that is different than my own? Can I become a better physician by providing R/S informed care to my patients?

Students who participate in this mini-elective will enjoy learning from live patient informants, didactic sessions, open forum discussions, and mock clinical scenarios with standardized patients (with little outside of the classroom work). Students who complete this mini-elective will also learn to assess patients with a three-question spiritual history; refer patients to the extensive pastoral-care/chaplaincy resources available at UPMC; and to consider patient R/S as an important and necessary component of high-quality healthcare.
Objectives:
1. By the end of this elective educational experience, medical students will obtain the knowledge to:
   - Summarize existing data regarding R/S in the healthcare setting.
   - Identify the extensive religious and spiritual resources for patients who are hospitalized.
   - Describe cultural competency and situational awareness, as it pertains to patients’ religious or spiritual needs.
2. During this elective educational experience, each medical student will participate in role plays of mock clinical scenarios and will demonstrate the skills necessary to obtain a spiritual history and provide appropriate patient counseling/referrals.
3. Throughout this elective educational experience, medical students will learn from patient informants to better understand R/S informed care as an important and effective aspect of holistic medical care.

Requirements:
- Students are expected to attend all sessions, but may still receive a certificate of completion for attending 4/6 sessions.
- Engage in mock clinical scenarios.
- Come prepared having read all required readings outlined for each session and be willing to engage in class discussions.
- Complete an anonymous pre- and post-course survey to help guide further curriculum development.

Pre-Requisites: None

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: This mini-elective would not have been possible without the initiative, dedication and excellence of Andrew Abboud and Laura McNamara who, while MS2 students, realized the need to engage this topic in the medical field. Their work to understand and incorporate this component as part of compassionate care, led to an initial 2-hour workshop on R/S informed care in May 2017 underwritten by the 2016-2017 Year of Diversity Provost Grant, and the creation of this mini-elective course.

COURSE OUTLINE:

SESSION ONE - Engaging the other dimension by opening the conversation: Acknowledging the role that religion and spirituality has in the medical encounter
Date/Time: January 8, 2018  5:00-7:00pm
Location: Scaife Hall, Rooms 430 A&B

Session Instructor(s): Krissy Moehling, MPH, Scott Mauer, MD, Lisa Podgurski, MD, Dena Hofkosh, MD

Description: This session will provide an overview to the role that religion and spirituality has in the lives of patients, how it influences their health, quality of life and medical decision making, and the desire that many patients have in wanting their R/S needs addressed by medical care teams. How does one engage R/S in conversation, either by initiating it or by responding to a request made by a patient? Is this even appropriate to do? What is the role of the provider in R/S care? What if your value system differs from your patient - is it authentic to address R/S when there is seemingly disparate views? This session seeks to address these questions and normalize the conversation through didactics, open forum discussion, and the opportunity to practice taking an R/S assessment using the framework of addressing R/S in dialogue as part of compassionate care via the NURSE model (Name, Understand, Respect, Support, Explore).
Objectives: Students will be able to:
1. Summarize existing data regarding the health effects of R/S and the preferences of patients to address R/S.
2. Explore how R/S can be engaged in an authentic manner between provider and patient.

Student Preparation: None.

SESSION TWO – Know thy self: The cultural framework of religion and spirituality in health
Date/Time: TBD: Tentative January 22, 2018  5:00-7:00pm
Location: Offsite – Bellefield Presbyterian Church. 4001 5th Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15213 (across from the UPitt bookstore).

Session Instructor(s): Jeannette South-Paul, MD and Abdesalam Soudi, PhD

Description: Our ability to engage and respond to others is filtered through our own cultural lens. Additionally, there is some evidence that spirituality plays an important role in leading to good outcomes in health care. Cultural competency begins then with the exploration of our own biases. This session will explore the cultural framework of religion/spirituality and its impact on health and decision making through narrative, a patient informant, in-class exercises, discussion, and the opportunity to partake in a journey to a faith community outside of the student’s.

Objectives: Student will be able to:
1. Develop a deeper appreciation for how cultural interpretations of religion/spirituality guide health and decision making.
2. Discuss how one’s own biases can influence this narrative and filter into professional advice.
3. Acquire skills to guide a culturally competent framework for discussion of religion and spirituality.

Student Preparation

Readings:

Direct link to article is:

Other: Culture Box

Please bring an object/personal item or several objects that you feel help describe you as a person, with a particular focus on your own Religion or belief system if you have one.
SESSION THREE – What is religion, what is spirituality, and how do they shape medical decisions?
Date/Time: January 29, 2018  5:00-7:00pm
Location: Scaife Hall, Rooms 430 A&B

Instructor(s): Daniel Hall, MD, MDiv, MHSc and Frank Lieberman, MD

Patient Informant: TBD.

Description: Now that we have proposed to you the idea of faith in medicine, what exactly is faith? How do different people conceptualize and experience religion? How is this different from spirituality? These are just several of the many questions we will attempt to answer as we take a deeper look into faith traditions, the ways in which they impact humans, and how the medical field attempts to measure this impact.

Objectives: Students will be able to:
1. Robustly discuss the similarities and differences between religion and spirituality.
2. Conceptualize intrinsic vs. extrinsic religiosity.
3. Develop a framework to understand how a patient’s religiosity may affect their decision making.

Student Preparation:
- Prior to Session 3, visit (or engage with) a faith community outside own tradition or non-tradition.
- Journal this experience noting aspects of discomfort, recognitions of implicit biases before, during and/or after the visit and how this awareness can be used to re-shape your personal dialogue both internally and in the role of a provider moving forward.

SESSION FOUR – End of life care: a framework for a discussion of religion, morality, and ethics
Date/Time: February 5, 2018  5:00-7:00pm
Location: Scaife Hall, Rooms 430 A&B

Instructor(s): Lisa Podgurski, MD, Scott Maurer, MD, Frank Lieberman, MD, April Christensen, MD, and Tara Cook, MD

Patient Informant: A panel consisting of four patients and family members from various faith traditions (including agnosticism or atheism) and intensity of beliefs (60 minutes)

Description: People frequently turn toward religion or spirituality in times of serious illness. In this session, we will explore how various faith traditions and personal beliefs affect care at the end of life. The session will open with a twenty-minute didactic discussing religious/spiritual issues and sources of distress in end of life care. Students will then have an opportunity to ask questions of a four-person panel. The panel will be followed by a forty-minute debriefing session where students will explore common themes, surprising responses, and personal reactions.

Objectives: Students will be able to:
1. Value the impact of different faith traditions and intensities of belief on end of life care.
2. Recognize common religious uncertainties at the end of life including the hope for a miracle, perspectives on artificial hydration and nutrition, and views on withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment.
3. Discuss how to apply previously learned skills when addressing a patient with religious distress at the end of life.

Student Preparation: None.

SESSION FIVE - Religion and spirituality in everyday medicine
Date/Time: February 12, 2018  5:00-7:00pm
Location: Scaife Hall, Rooms 430 A&B

Instructor(s): Donald B. Middleton, MD and Andrew Nowalk, MD

Patient Informant: TBD (patient who knows Dr. Middleton or Dr. Nowalk, speaks to how R/S shapes personal health narrative, 30 minutes)
**Description:** Although attention to R/S informed care is most commonly thought of in end of life scenarios, patients’ religion and spirituality are important cultural determinants of health in the primary care setting. In this session, students will consider the many, and often inconspicuous, examples of how R/S affects the shared decision-making of a patient and physician in the primary care setting. Students will also apply skills learned throughout the mini-elective in mock clinical encounters with standardized patients.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to:
1. Appreciate the role of R/S informed care in the primary care setting.
2. Identify practical scenarios in which it may be appropriate to inquire about a patient’s R/S.
3. Apply skills of spiritual history-taking in mock clinical patient encounters.

**Standardized Patients:** Role play taking a spiritual assessment using a mix of case scenarios and impromptus. Uses the framework of addressing R/S in dialogue as part of compassionate care via the NURSE model (Name, Understand, Respect, Support, Explore). Cases to consider include caring for refugee/migrant populations, counseling on contraception-abortion, and standard health maintenance visits.

**Student Preparation:** None.

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**SESSION SIX - Meet the Chaplains: Knowing how and when to refer your patients to pastoral care services**

*Date/Time: February 19, 2018  5:00-7:00pm*

*Location: Scaife Hall, Rooms 430 A&B*

**Instructor(s):** Rev. Richard Freeman, Sr.

**Description:** As a physician, you are not expected to become an expert on providing R/S informed care, especially when it comes to counseling patients on spiritual or theological doctrines of any religious tradition. Thankfully, our hospitals are staffed with pastoral care teams to help address our patients’ specific R/S needs. In this session, students will learn from a panel of chaplains and/or pastoral care team members to learn about the important roles they have in interdisciplinary R/S informed care.

Following this discussion, students will participate in a debriefing session with the course directors to reflect and discuss the lessons they have learned over the last six sessions.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to:
1. Identify the extensive religious and spiritual resources for patients who are hospitalized.
2. Participate in both written and group reflection exercises.
3. Have an enhance awareness that attending to the R/S needs of patients is a standard practice and a cornerstone to compassion medicine.
4. Have a heightened awareness to personal barriers to attending to a patient’s R/S wishes.

**Student Preparation:** Students will come prepared to reflect on their experiences throughout the duration of the mini-elective. Students will be asked to journal their thoughts, and to participate in a group debriefing discussion and course survey.