

MCS Selective Spirituality and Health

Description of the Course

Research indicates that patients want to discuss their spiritual beliefs and practices with their physicians, yet many physicians are reluctant to do so. This course will help medical students understand and overcome that misalignment by empowering students to respond to challenging situations compassionately and competently. This four-session selective will enable students to increase their skill and comfort taking a patient's spiritual history, respond effectively to patients when they ask their physician to pray for them, assist patients who delay medical decision making while holding out hope for a miracle, and respond compassionately to patients who hold religious beliefs that support suffering as a virtue even when medical interventions could alleviate their pain. Students will also have the opportunity to reflect on their own spiritualities and learn how that aspect of their lives can be nurtured as part of their professional growth. Students will learn through didactics, case discussions, and personal reflection seminars in these highly interactive sessions.

Instructor



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Educational Objectives:

At the conclusion of this selective you will have the ability to:

1. Perform a detailed spiritual history as part of a social history.
2. Respond effectively to a patient's request for prayer.
3. Discuss the ethical issues involved with the power dynamics in the patient-physician relationship that occur in the context of religious/spiritual conversations.
4. Respond effectively to a patient's decision to refuse treatment because of religious beliefs that support suffering as a virtue.
5. Discuss various religious beliefs about suffering that patients may express to refuse treatment.
6. Critically reflect on your own spirituality and how it can be nurtured as part of their professional growth and well-being.

Sessions:

Week 1: How to Take a Spiritual History

Students will learn how to take a spiritual history using the FICA spiritual history tool, briefly share their spiritual/religious histories, and discuss a case.

Readings:

Marin DB, Sharma V, Powers R, Fleenor D. Spiritual care and physicians: Understanding spirituality in medical practice. HealthCare Chaplaincy Network.

https://spiritualcareassociation.org/docs/resources/hccn_whitepaper_spirituality_and_physicians.pdf.

Published 2017. Accessed May 31, 2022.

Puchalski CM. The FICA spiritual history tool# 274. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 2014 Jan 1;17(1):105-6. <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1089/jpm.2013.9458>

Week 2: What to Do When Patients Ask their Doctor to Pray

Students will discuss cases in which patients request prayer from their physician and explore various strategies for responding effectively.

Readings:

Balboni MJ, Babar A, Dillinger J, Phelps AC, George E, Block SD, Kachnic L, Hunt J, Peteet J, Prigerson HG, VanderWeele TJ. "It depends": viewpoints of patients, physicians, and nurses on patient-practitioner prayer in the setting of advanced cancer. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 2011 May 1;41(5):836-47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2010.07.008>

Christensen AR, Cook TE, Arnold RM. How should clinicians respond to requests from patients to participate in prayer? *AMA Journal of Ethics*. 2018 Jul 1;20(7):E621-629.

<https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/how-should-clinicians-respond-requests-patients-participate-prayer/2018-07>

Week 3: How to Respond to Patients Holding Out Hope for a Miracle

Student will discuss cases in which patients and their loved ones want their doctor to "do everything" while they wait for a miracle and explore strategies for responding effectively.

Readings:

Bibler, T. M., Stahl, D., Fantus, S., Lion, A., & Brothers, K. B. (2020). A process-based approach to responding to parents or guardians who hope for a miracle. *Pediatrics*, 145(3).

<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-2319>

Cooper, R. S., Ferguson, A., Bodurtha, J. N., & Smith, T. J. (2014). AMEN in challenging conversations: bridging the gaps between faith, hope, and medicine. *Journal of Oncology Practice*, 10(4), e191-e195.

<https://ascopubs.org/doi/pdf/10.1200/JOP.2014.001375>

Shinall Jr, M. C., Stahl, D., & Bibler, T. M. (2018). Addressing a Patient's Hope for a Miracle. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 55(2), 535-539. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2017.10.002>

Week 4: How to Respond to Religious Beliefs about Suffering and Death

Student and instructor will discuss two cases about patients who wants to suffer and die for religious reasons and explore strategies for responding effectively and appropriately.

Readings:

Frush, B. W., Eberly Jr, J. B., & Curlin, F. A. (2018). What Should Physicians and Chaplains Do When a Patient Believes God Wants Him to Suffer? *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 20(7), E613-620.

<https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/what-should-physicians-and-chaplains-do-when-patient-believes-god-wants-him-suffer/2018-07?effort=0>

Meador, K. G. (2009). When Patients Say, "It's in God's Hands." *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 11(10), 750-754.

<https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/when-patients-say-its-gods-hands/2009-10>

Responsibilities for Successful completion:

To complete the selective, a student must:

1. Attend the four sessions
2. Complete all the readings
3. Engage in case conversations
4. Write a brief concluding 3-4-page reflection paper