Professional Chaplaincy
Its Role and Importance in Healthcare

*Editors*
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This paper describes the role and significance of spiritual care and is the first joint statement on this subject prepared by the five largest healthcare chaplaincy organizations in North America representing over 10,000 members.

As a consensus paper, it presents the perspectives of these bodies on the spiritual care they provide for the benefit of individuals, healthcare organizations and communities.

Throughout this paper, the word spirituality is inclusive of religion; spiritual care includes pastoral care.

Spiritual caregivers in healthcare institutions are often known as chaplains although they may have different designations in some settings, i.e. spiritual care providers. The paper contains four sections.
The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO, 1998) in the U.S. states, "Patients have a fundamental right to considerate care that safeguards their personal dignity and respects their cultural, psychosocial, and spiritual values." A Canadian accreditation agency makes similar statements. Such regulations, and efforts to meet them, flow from the belief that attention to the human spirit, including mind, heart and soul, contributes to the goals of healthcare organizations.

SECTION I
The Meaning and Practice of Spiritual Care
This first section describes spirit as a natural dimension of all persons and defines the nature of spiritual care. With the basic premise that attention to spirituality is intrinsic to healthcare, the paper establishes their relationship and outlines the various environments in which care is provided.

SECTION II
Who Provides Spiritual Care?
Professional chaplains provide spiritual care. This section describes their education, skill and certification.

SECTION III
The Functions and Activities of Professional Chaplains
This section delineates the typical activities of professional chaplains within healthcare settings, focusing on their care of persons and their participation in healthcare teams.

SECTION IV
The Benefits of Spiritual Care Provided by Professional Chaplains
The materials here describe how professional chaplains benefit healthcare patients and their families, staff members, employing organizations, and communities.