



Dear APC™ Member,

Many of you over the past few weeks have contacted me and APC regarding the establishment of a new spiritual care organization. This group has continued to make inflammatory statements which are critical of the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC™) and our other certifying bodies and cognate groups. Now there is nothing wrong with valid critique but mind you this is not. Most of us learn that through the clinical training process, it often serves us well to look at other's views and impressions in order to learn and grow. This is true for individuals and for organizations alike. Yet, in a recent blog by one of our past presidents, George Handzo, who was defending the establishment of this new spiritual care organization which also happens to be his employer, he purports that the APC™ certification process "is not doing its job". He also wrote that what we are doing is "just not good enough" and that we have been unwilling to make changes. Well, we strongly disagree!

I have personally worked very collegially with George in the past as we both serve on the Standing Committee on Palliative Care and End-of-Life of the National Quality Forum. He has done some very good work and I am grateful for his past service to APC™. But, on this matter, I must respectfully and strongly disagree with his statements.

As your current president, I'd like to share my opinion about these statements with you:

1. When the common standards were first developed in 2003, this was by no means the end of our journey to develop competent chaplains. You know this and I know this. In fact, just last fall a task force was appointed to review and update these common standards which have since been presented to our respective cognate boards. Our Standards of Practice for professional chaplains have been revised and updated along with our standards for continuing education to ensure all Board Certified Chaplains (BCC) remain current in their practice. **We are constantly looking at ways to improve our standards, our processes and our profession.** Our CEO, Pat Appelhans, JD, has been working alongside an exceptional national staff since 2009 and has energized and challenged our organization to become even greater. Your elected Board of Directors is second to none. I've served on the Board of Directors with three other presidents who have all been great leaders and agents of change in our profession and within our association. APC has not been idle!

2. Handzo feels his organization's new process and requirements for professional chaplain certification "conforms to other best practices such as medicine and nursing". We simply disagree. In response, we pose this question: Does *reducing* the requirement from a minimum of 1600 hours (as required by the Common Standards) to 800 hours put professional chaplaincy on par with peers in the helping/health care professions? I think not. Our APC™ requirement of 1600 hours minimum, along with rigorous written requirements and a peer based interview, is much more in line with the best practices of our peers in social work, counseling and medicine. Can you imagine one of these disciplines cutting their clinical training in half? **Based on this, the board is very concerned this new organization's minimal requirement will just dilute what we at APC™ and our cognate groups have worked tirelessly for decades to accomplish.** Our professional peers understand the need for extensive clinical supervised training.
  
3. APC™ leadership is strong and vibrant. We work hard to advance the profession. We have leaders across a broad spectrum of pastoral and spiritual care, pastoral education, academia, medicine and business partnering who continue to move professional chaplaincy to the next level. There is one statement I actually agree with Handzo on. He wrote: *"At the end of the day, this is not about associations or endorsers or who has what or what we want for ourselves. It is about giving patients, caregivers and institutions the best quality spiritual care we can give now."*

In response to these attacks, I would like to make a simple statement to APC members:

**WE are giving quality spiritual care NOW. We are serving patients and loved ones NOW. We are in the trenches NOW. We are training competent chaplains NOW. We are mentoring those who struggle NOW. Clearly the standards and competencies, the processes and measures WE currently employ are building competent chaplains NOW.**

Can we grow, improve and evolve? Absolutely. We have. We are. We will. We must. Let's continue this exciting journey together - you, our board, our national staff and our strong professional partners. APC™ professional chaplains and those organizations utilizing the Common Standards are the most highly qualified in the industry.

Many of you want to know how you can promote APC™. We will do it with you, our members, as our most valuable resource. You have been through the process; you know our value. You can help assist and guide those who may be confused with another choice that seems easier, faster and less stringent. When you get those calls about how to become a chaplain, as I do often, explain the requirements for the recognized gold standard of chaplaincy certification. Explain that reputable health care organizations that employ chaplains recognize APC™, NACC and NAJC as THE standard for hiring the best in class. Explain that APC™ is THE home for professional chaplains and that ALL are welcome.

Those of you who know me well often say I always try to be a consensus builder. Those of us who are part of APC™ know who we are, why we are here and DO believe in our mission and

vision. Since APC™ and our cognate organizations have been falsely criticized over the past few weeks, APC has resisted responding other than by giving you true and accurate information about our work, our collaborative spirit and the direction APC™ is and was moving *long before* this new organization announced a surprising formation and hostile attack. However, when one of our former leaders writes an open access column that disparages and misrepresents our organization, I must speak out and always will. I hope you feel that I have done this reasonably and in the context which represents our values and beliefs. We are a large and historic organization with many voices and an important legacy. Please continue to let your voices be heard and thank you for listening to mine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Margie Atkinson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. Margie Atkinson BCC, president