

Research observes doctors' consideration of patients' spiritual needs

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Research from Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy, the official journal of the Association of Professional Chaplains and a publication from Routledge, aims to better understand doctors' attentiveness to patients'/families' spiritual concerns as well as doctors' attitudes towards referrals to chaplains.

While chaplains are the specialists in religion and [spirituality](#) related healthcare concerns, they require cooperation from other [health professionals](#) in order to do their job effectively. Doctors play an especially important role in integrating religion/spirituality into healthcare, as evidenced by numerous studies involving patient surveys. These studies also show, however, that a majority of [doctors](#) rarely bring up religion/spirituality in cases where the patient isn't near death.

In the study, 108 pediatricians and oncologists were surveyed regarding their beliefs about the health relevance of and their [attentiveness](#) to their patients' spirituality. In a crisis situation, 49% reported inquiring about spirituality, and 83% agreed that doctors should refer patients to chaplains. Those whose clinical experience had positively impacted their spirituality were more likely to address spirituality/religion in a crisis situation, and self-identified Christians were four times more likely to address spirituality routinely whereas those who expected negative patient reaction were 19% less likely to inquire. Only 3% of respondents reported routinely performing a spiritual history with new [patients/families](#), suggesting that training in this area is lacking.

Several limitations were identified, one of which was the focus on respondents from the American Northwest. Additionally, the wording and format of the survey subjected the results to a certain degree of self-reporting bias. The authors suggest further research covering other regions with different research designs, such as intervention studies to determine the best ways to educate future and current doctors.

More information: "Doctors' Attentiveness to the Spirituality/Religion of their Patients in Pediatric and Oncology Settings in the Northwest USA." Stephen D. W. King, Martha A. Dimmers, Shelby Langer, Patricia E. Murphy. *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*. Vol. 19, Iss. 4, 2013

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