

Focused Negotiating Cultural and Religious Difference

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Abstract:

An emerging body of literature on what professional health care chaplains do identifies involvement in medical decision making and goals of care conversations as a key component of this role. In addition to several published articles documenting the frequency of chaplain involvement in medical decision making, a recent national survey of board-certified chaplains described and measured the discrete activities included in that role and discussed chaplains' perception of their contribution to medical decision making as members of the health care team. To augment this knowledge, a book of case studies was proposed. The need for a robust body of case studies for the profession of healthcare chaplaincy has been effectively established by leaders in research and education. Case studies highlighting and reflecting upon the specific role of chaplains in medical decision making, however, are virtually non-existent to date.

The book will focus specifically on cases where the chaplain had a key role in supporting patients and families in the medical decision making process. Participation in this project was solicited as part of a national survey of board-certified chaplains. Guidelines for submitting a summary of a case were provided to potential authors who identified themselves as interested at the end of the survey. The editorial team reviewed submissions and issued invitations to nine chaplains to expand their summaries into case studies. The categorization for the case studies emerged from qualitative analysis of data from the larger research project and from close reading of the case summaries submitted for possible inclusion. The structure for this volume categorized case studies into three parts each part followed by a chaplain respondent and a non-chaplain respondent selected for their expertise in the category of cases.

This book has the potential to be foundational to the training of chaplains as well as to future research on the effectiveness of chaplaincy care, specifically in the area of how chaplains support the emotional processing of decision making, serve as a bridge and translator with the medical team, and integrate the patient's story, religious beliefs, and values into the medical decision making process.

My response to the three cases, focused on negotiating cultural and religious differences, discussed a metaphysical framework of understanding language and normative trajectories. I highlight through the cases how chaplains serve as cultural brokers and interpreters between the patient/family and medical team in the process of decision making.