



[[Back to the Articles of the Month Index Page](#)]

April 2012 Article of the Month

This month's article selection is by Chaplain John Ehman,
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Fitchett, G., Tartaglia, A., Dodd-McCue, D. and Murphy, P. "**Educating chaplains for research literacy: results of a national survey of Clinical Pastoral Education residency programs.**" *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 66, no. 1 (2012): 3:1-12 [online journal page designation].

SUMMARY and COMMENT: Research has been a theme in clinical pastoral education since the founding days of Anton Boisen, who used it "to inform his ministry and educate his students" [p. 10], but its place in curricula for chaplaincy training has varied over time and with each training program. While the ACPE does not formally address research as an educational objective for its accredited centers, the organization has long supported projects by students and supervisors and encouraged dialogue and investigation informally through such means as our Research Network. Now, however, the role of research in education for professional chaplaincy has been given new focus by the Association of Professional Chaplains through their adoption of [Standards of Practice](#), Standard 12 of which states, "The chaplain practices evidence-based care including ongoing evaluation of new practices and, when appropriate, contributes to or conducts research." It is with this in mind that a group of leading researchers in the ACPE undertook the present study of "residency programs that serve as the primary training for people who seek to become professional chaplains" [p. 2].

To the best of our knowledge, there have been no prior investigations of the extent of research education in ACPE-accredited residency programs. Thus, the aim of the present study was to assess current practice regarding research education among ACPE-accredited residency programs. [p. 2]

Fitchett, et al., surveyed a random sample of 26 out of the more than 150 ACPE programs (21 in free-standing centers and 5 CPE systems), interviewing one supervisor in each case. The sample included at least one center from each region of the association. Their primary finding was:

[T]hree of the 26 (12%) CPE residency programs surveyed had intentional, consistent, and substantive teaching about research in their curriculum.... Approximately one-quarter of the residency programs had some teaching about research, but it was not an intentional, consistent or substantive part of the program. We found that nearly two-thirds of the surveyed programs did not include teaching about research. [p. 4; and see also the tabular breakdown of these figures on the same page]

Among the supplemental findings: "While nearly two-thirds of the residency programs surveyed had no education about research, five supervisors reported they had plans to initiate or expand education about research in their residency programs" [p. 6], yet "[N]one of the supervisors interviewed mentioned the new APC

Standards nor did they mention research literacy as a core component of their CPE residency programs" [p. 7]. The authors line out well the various comments from the interviewed supervisors and offer insights about what factors may be influencing the way research is viewed and operationalized as an educational component [--see esp. pp. 7-8], giving a broad perspective that should be valuable to every ACPE supervisor and supervisory education student. A concluding section on Implications for Clinical Pastoral Education [-p. 9] should also be of special interest. Though there may be a number of factors that act to discourage supervisors from incorporating research into their programs, one could be an overly narrow conception of how a research component might be realized in a curriculum [-- see esp. p. 8]. A major contribution of the article may lie in its explication of the "three levels of chaplain involvement in research" [p. 2] that are suggested in the APC Standard:

The first level, which is expected of all board certified chaplains, is basic research literacy; that is, an ability to understand published research findings and, where appropriate, to integrate those findings in clinical practice. The second level, intermediate competence, is applicable to a more limited group of chaplains and includes the ability to collaborate on research projects being led by colleagues in chaplaincy or other disciplines. The third level, advanced competence, is applicable to an even smaller group of chaplains with the appropriate training and includes the ability to function as the lead investigator in a research project that is later peer-reviewed for publication or presentation at a conference.... [p. 2]

It is important -- and the authors are quick to clarify -- that "Standard 12 does *not* require all chaplains to do research" [p. 2], as the very title of the article places emphasis squarely upon the need to promote research *literacy*.

For researchers, this report is a quite solid point of departure for additional study, and the authors do offer some ideas about Future Research [p. 9] and give a good bibliography of 46 references. They also provide their survey instrument in an appendix [p. 12].

This research formed the basis of the authors' workshop, "Teaching Research in CPE Residency Programs," at the February 2012 national ACPE conference (Alexandria, VA), and materials from that workshop -- slides downloadable as [PowerPoint](#) or [PDF](#) files, along with a [handout](#) -- may be useful companion items when reading the article.

[Disclosure of possible conflict of interest: this writer is noted in the article. --JE]

Suggestions for the Use of the Article for Student Discussion:

This article is particularly well suited for supervisory education students (e.g., at consortia or regional supervisory education meetings). The opening paragraphs [pp. 1-2] give a glimpse the background of the subject of research in chaplaincy education, and the discussion section [esp. pp. 7-8] considers factors that may affect supervisors incorporating research into their programs. Students might discuss how a research component fits with their own theories of education and the mission of the ACPE. What do students think of the situation of the nearly two-thirds of the programs that do not teach research? (What exposure to research do the supervisory students themselves have?) The article further offers many examples of *how* research might be pursued in a program, and these could prompt some brainstorming. Moreover, are students able to distinguish strategies for promoting research literacy from those aimed at training for more advanced involvement, and do students feel *prepared* to lead Level 1/Level 2 students in a program element around research? Does the existence of Standard 12 of the APC's Standards of Practice make a difference in their eyes?

Related Items of Interest:

I. The introductory paragraphs of our featured article give a sense of the background to dialogue regarding research in chaplaincy. For more about early initiatives to promote research within and between the College of Chaplains (which would become the Association of Professional Chaplains) and the ACPE, see John Thomas' notes in our [Fall 2003 Newsletter](#) (§3) on the Joint Council on Research in Pastoral Care and Counseling.

II. The Canadian Association for Spiritual Care designates [Spiritual Care Competencies](#). The section on Research states:

Sees research as integral to professional functioning and in keeping with one's area of expertise.

10.1: Reads research articles as continuing education pertinent to one's area of practice.

10.2: Asks researchable questions as these arise from practice.

10.3: Participates in and/or promotes research.

10.4: Uses appropriate methodologies and established ethical protocols (if/when conducting research).

10.5: Subjects one's findings as required and appropriate to professional peer review (if/when conducting research).

10.6: Disseminates research information.

See also the [Curriculum for Basic SPE](#), part VII, items i ([Research in Spiritual Care and Therapy](#)) and ii ([Research and Publication](#)).

III. See resources listed in the [Incorporating Research into CPE](#) section of our Network site.

IV. See the [November 2010 Article-of-the-Month](#): Murphy, P. E. and Fitchett, G. "**Introducing chaplains to research: 'This could help me.'**" *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 16 nos. 3-4 (2010): 79-94.

If you have suggestions about the form and/or content of the site, e-mail Chaplain John Ehman (Network Convener) at john.ehman@uphs.upenn.edu .

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