



## TRANSFORMING CHAPLAINCY

Promoting Research Literacy  
for Improved Patient Outcomes

January 9, 2018

Dear Colleagues,

We write, at the start of the year, to share our excitement about the growing research orientation in the field of healthcare chaplaincy. We have written about this shift and are actively promoting it through our four-year Transforming Chaplaincy project supported by grants of \$4.5M from the John Templeton Foundation. Chaplains in healthcare will be more effective if their work is based on solid research that shows what kinds of work are most effective in different situations and what the effects of that work are on individuals and institutions.

To date our project has enabled 17 [board certified chaplains](#) to enroll in master degree programs in public health, biostatistics, epidemiology, and related fields. More than [65 Clinical Pastoral Education programs](#) have received small grants to integrate research into their teaching, which to date has reached approximately 266 CPE students. And 102 students to date have enrolled in a [free online course](#) about chaplaincy research being offered through Virginia Commonwealth University. We recognize that demand for this course exceeds supply and are actively working to make more seats available for additional students.

We launched a new translational [research website](#) last fall to make it easy for all chaplains to stay up to date on the most recent research in the field and to use that knowledge in their daily care of patients, family members, and staff. This website is an ongoing collaboration with the [Joint Research Council](#), a group that includes more than twenty professional chaplaincy organizations from around the world. All are welcome to join our [Facebook page](#) or [Twitter feed](#) and [subscribe to our regular newsletter](#).

Given the demand and excitement for research-oriented chaplaincy, we offered our first week-long [Chaplaincy Summer Research Institute](#) in Chicago last summer, attended by 28 people, and are planning the second in Boston, July 23-27. Registration is now open. This week-long intensive training allows participants to review basic research concepts, get consultation for current or planned research activities, and network with other chaplain-researchers. We are also piloting a research project in 6 intensive care units to assess the effect of chaplaincy interventions on end of life decisions.

The people who educate healthcare chaplains include clinical supervisors as well as theological educators and members of professional chaplaincy organizations. To better understand this field we are six months into a new two-year project, funded by a \$275,000 [grant from the Luce Foundation](#), in collaboration with the ACPE. We are mapping all of the organizations involved in the training of healthcare chaplains, gathering and analyzing their curriculum, and beginning to consider the extent to which the training meets the requirements of the work. We have learned that [a third of theological schools](#) have a chaplaincy-training program or track, efforts that have developed in the past twenty years as enrollment in Christian theological schools has declined. We are also analyzing new national level data that suggests that growing numbers of clergy are working outside rather than inside of traditional parishes and congregations.

This is an exciting time to be involved in this work. There is a strong commitment to a research-informed approach to professional healthcare chaplaincy on the part of both professional chaplaincy leaders and frontline chaplains (Fitchett et al., 2014; Snowden et al., 2016), and an agenda is emerging for the research needed to advance the profession (Damen et al., 2017; Handzo et al., 2014). In the midst of this excitement, there remains a huge amount to do. We need larger and better studies that connect chaplaincy interventions to outcomes for patients, family members, and staff. We need to show what the financial costs and benefits of chaplaincy are to institutions and think strategically about how to make the case for this work. In addition to chaplains well-established support for those who are ill, we need to consider what chaplains can provide preventatively to help people stay healthy. Given America's changing religious demographics, we must continue to encourage chaplains who are not Protestant, Catholic or Jewish to join the profession, and we must radically expand the proportion of chaplains who are of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The research agenda also must include a review of the competencies needed to practice effectively as a generalist or specialist in healthcare chaplaincy as well as investigations of the best methods to certify achievement of those competencies (Barnes & Massey, 2017; Cooper et al., 2010; Tartaglia & Dodd-McCue, 2010). Current claims of evidence-based chaplaincy education or certification are based on expert opinion, the lowest level in the research evidence hierarchy. Going forward this work must be based on more rigorous research methods. In addition, we need research that clarifies how theological educators, Clinical Pastoral Educators and others can most productively collaborate to educate chaplains about what they need to know before they start their first positions. And we need to think about opportunities to collaborate with chaplains outside of healthcare and consider what chaplains who work in different sectors might have to teach one another.

We continue our work this year with energy from all of you and in collaboration with our established partners (ACPE, APC, NACC, NAJC, JRC). At the joint APC/NACC conference in July we look forward to the publication of a new chaplaincy research reader, *Evidence-Based Healthcare Chaplaincy: A Research Reader*, edited by George Fitchett, Kelsey White, and Kathryn Lyndes published by Jessica Kingsley Press. We believe this book will soon be the

standard text for efforts to advance chaplain research literacy. We will soon share details of our free Winter-Spring strategic webinars for chaplains. And we are thrilled about the emerging [research publications](#) of the Transforming Chaplaincy Fellows.

We are grateful for your support and continue to welcome all who share our commitment to collaboration, transparency, and evidence-based practice to join us. The aim of all of these efforts are to advance chaplain research literacy, continue to build the strongest research base possible for the work, better prepare chaplains to care for all people, and create sustainable collaborations that enable these efforts to be institutionalized for the long term. We hope you will join us in keeping our eyes on these broad goals as we continue our work together this year.

With thanks,

George and Wendy

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