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LECTURES

Nurturing Spirituality in Healthcare Chaplaincy



Finding our place: Spiritual care in Australian healthcare

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As in many developed countries the understanding and practice of spiritual care in healthcare contexts in Australia has undergone enormous changes. In some places these changes have been more profound than in others. These changes have occurred in response to a number of wider societal shifts, both locally and internationally and include changes in demographics, religious affiliation and attitudes towards religion and faith. In the Australian context this has produced increasing variation in the ways spiritual care is delivered, and therefore the question of how to nurture spirituality in this diverse landscape of spiritual care becomes increasingly complex.

This presentation will begin by describing the Australian context and provide some different perspectives of Australian spirituality in order to give participants some background to the challenges faced by spiritual care and some understanding of an emerging concept for nurturing spirituality.

The presentation will then move to describe the current state of spiritual care in Australian healthcare with specific reference to some of the existing methods being offered to nurture the spirituality of spiritual care providers.

This current state of spiritual care, comprising aspects of both variation and confusion across the nation, creates a context which is the very anti-thesis of nurturing. What flows from this state is uncertainty, lack of clear roles and responsibilities and compromised quality and safety of care. Moreover, it fosters tension, suspicion and rivalry between and amongst spiritual care providers and the organisations with authority in the field.

In order to nurture spirituality there is a need for clarity – a need to find our place, the ground on which we stand. Can we be clear about what we provide? What do we mean by the language we use? Does anyone else in healthcare think this is important? What is our contribution?

Moving towards some answers to these questions involved a national survey (2016-2017) and a national consensus conference (2017). The results of the survey and the outcomes from the conference will be presented in brief.

While there are some clear directions for the future, to recognise and claim the ground on which we stand will require a deep understanding of what is required of us to nurture spirituality. This is about authenticity, vulnerability and courage. While those who provide spiritual care are well practiced in these qualities as they relate to their practice of spiritual care, how can these qualities be fostered as we engage with one another to create a shared future for spiritual care in Australian healthcare?

In answering this question some final reflections will be offered on the role of nurturing both the spirituality of spiritual care providers and the spirituality of the profession as an enabler for providing a shared vision.