

Spiritual Health Response to the Ebola Virus

As you prepare your hospitals for the possible arrival of patients exhibiting signs and symptoms of the Ebola virus, we want to pass onto you a few things we have done at Emory University Hospital in Spiritual Health to help our staff manage their anxiety and fear.

- Acknowledge that the anxiety and fear is normal; respect and honor it.
- Create space for open and honest dialogue among your staff and leaders; this will help to develop trust and let your staff know that transparency is a high value. At Emory we did this by having multiple Town Hall meetings upon the arrival of each new patient. Our Infectious Disease physicians were front and center and helped to decrease anxiety by giving staff the facts about the Ebola virus.
- Create continuing opportunities to assist staff with managing their anxiety:
 - Our Spiritual Health department wrote an article that was distributed to all staff throughout the hospital on vocation (personal/spiritual/organizational). This article helped to frame for our staff the spiritual backdrop for why we do what we do and the vocational calling embedded in the work of caring for those who are suffering.
 - We also posted words of encouragement and hope in the isolation unit to remind staff of their gifts and to invite them to live fully in their skill, competence, and training for this exact moment. A quote from a meditation by Howard Thurman drawn from a text in the Hebrew Bible became our mantra, “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”
 - One of our chaplains created a presentation that was posted on our television screen in the hallway as a way to offer calm and peace to all who traversed the hallways of our hospital..
 - We provided a mindfulness CD, and soft, quiet, relaxing music for the staff in the isolation unit to assist with processing after having spent extensive time in the unit with the patients.
- Care for our patients and their family was a high priority. Even though we had no direct contact with the patients who were in isolation, it was our belief in Spiritual Health that if we cared for those caring for the patients and for the patients’ families who waited anxiously and prayerfully for their loved ones to recover from the Ebola virus, then we had in fact cared for the patients. Our chaplain assigned to the isolation unit had several opportunities to have personal contact with the patients once they left the isolation containment area.
- As we continued to receive patients in our hospital, paying attention to the physical, emotional and spiritual energy of our staff caring for the patients became even more important. Providing intentional time for debriefing and processing of feelings became a priority – our staff were intentional about making rounds throughout the day and evening to offer staff an opportunity to continue to process this experience and the emotional and spiritual impact.
 - The primary focus of our Spiritual Health team was to create a hospitable space where everyone was invited to live fully in the sacred and holy space of uncertainty, fear, anxiety and hope. As you prepare your staff and health care institution for the possibility of caring for a patient with Ebola, your greatest work will be reminding the care responder that this work of caring for those who are suffering and in need is a holy and sacred calling.

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