

The Role of Clinical Buddhist Chaplains in the Hospice/Palliative Care

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Abstract

Caring for the terminally ill patients is different from caring for patients with other illnesses. There are four core concepts behind the hospice/palliative care. The first one is to guide patients to accept death, and help them understand that death is only a natural course in life that no living beings can do anything about but face up to and accept. The next is to extend an all-encompassing caring service to patients. Symptom control is top priority so that patients' living quality can be improved and they can die peacefully at the very end. To die in a state of peace and grace does not refer to only the physical condition of patients. Issues related to other levels, be it mentally, socially, or spiritually, should all be taken into consideration so that patients' demands can be better met. The third one is to communicate with patients from the very basic level up in order to understand what physical and mental anguish

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they are suffering and what spiritual needs they might have. Through such communication sessions, patients should be informed of their illnesses and guided to accept death and be prepared for it. Out of the innate kindness of humanity, chaplains extend their loving care to patients, work hard to understand patients' needs, and then help them to die peacefully. The last one is to have a professional team consisting of doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, chaplains, social workers, volunteers, etc. to provide patient-centered family-focus total care.

This report is written based on the theses related to clinical chaplains' role in the hospice/palliative care released during the past eight years. Included in this report are such subjects as the definition of spiritual care, the framework of caring for patients, as well as the interactive care model between chaplains and patients. Through the discussion of these subjects, several other clinical issues and the evaluation of patients' spiritual condition that fall under the umbrella of professional spiritual care are also introduced. The role of clinical Buddhist chaplains is also exemplified through the introduction of case report and studies of clinical services.

Key Words: *hospice-palliative Care, clinical Buddhist chaplain, spiritual care, quality of life, good death*