

Session 2: Paige Delgado, RN // The Science Behind Spiritual Engagement

Morning. Um, thank you Dr. McKinney for everything that you just shared that was so impactful and yes, I couldn't agree more, um, Ben, that it's been such a gift to be on mission with you for all these minutes that we've known each other now today. Um, as he said, my name is Paige Delgado and I'm a registered nurse.

I've been on staff with Watermark Health for the last eight years. Prior to that, I was a nurse in the hospitals, both at Parkland and Children's for eight years as well, mostly in the ICU. So I've gotten to see all aspects of healthcare in my time. Um, my story of faith is similar to Ben's as well. I grew up in the church learning about this Jesus who was the Savior.

I just didn't realize I was the one needing saving. And so it came much later in life for me. I'm actually about four years into my nursing career when I finally heard and understood the gospel and its need in my life. Um, and not only did trusting in Christ radically changed my life, but it radically changed the way I viewed healthcare, the way I viewed being a nurse, the way I cared for my patients.

The way I led my co workers and my team. And so today I just want to share a little bit of my experience with you and what I've learned around how, um, spiritual engagement has its place in healthcare. The reality is when working in healthcare, we often believe that spiritual engagement doesn't have a place in any medical setting.

And sometimes we feel discouraged, especially for those of you who work in for profit settings to share our faith. So today my goal is to point to some of the science and literature that says the opposite. That helps us understand that the spiritual and the physical are deeply intertwined. I want to give you some data talking points that you can use as you go back into your own workplaces to say, Hey, this does matter.

And in between I'll give you a few of my favorite tips and transitions on how to start doing that, how to start sharing your faith in your work setting. And so before we jump into that,

let's think about what are the barriers to incorporating our faith and spiritual engagement into healthcare. One there's culture.

The world tells us that my truth is my truth and that anyone who tries to force their beliefs on me is intolerant. Culture tells us that there should be a separation of church and state in all aspects of life. And culture tells us that as employees, we serve the organizations we work for alone. There's a lack of knowledge.

We believe that physical healing is simply about the medicine. We want to find the diagnosis and respond with the appropriate medical treatment. We believe that patients don't want to talk about faith. They want to come in, get a quick fix, get a prescription, and get back on to their regular lives as fast as possible.

For And then there's fear. We fear that patients will reject any conversation of faith, that they might feel manipulated, or that in some way we'll break trust with them if we try to open up that door. We also believe that the organizations we work for prohibit spiritual engagement, and we fear that there might be punishment for anyone who breaks the rules.

But evidence is showing that spirituality has a valuable place in a person's health and well being. So let's think first, imagine how does illness affect a person? When a person becomes ill, their dignity, value, and humanity can now be reduced to a diagnosis. Their identity becomes their illness.

Introducing spiritual engagement in healthcare is a way to humanize an otherwise sterile, foreign, and frightening experience. But the reality we face is that patient autonomy and personal beliefs can cause friction within the system of American healthcare, a system that is often structured to ensure survival over well being.

So before I jump into some of the literature and statistics, I want to just define two terms you'll hear me use a lot because they're kind of general and broad. Spirituality is the quest for meaning and purpose, transcendence, connectedness and values. And religiosity can be a membership in a religious congregation, attendance at religious services, living within

a religious community, self reported religiosity, engaging in spiritual disciplines like prayer or meditation, meditation, meditation.

Or just a person's concept of God or any deity and how that concept is significant in his or her life. So the question at hand is spirituality and religion important when engaging in taking a health history, in a physical exam, or just in providing health care services in general. Short answer to my whole talk, yes.

But let's look at some of the research. The research shows that spirituality and religiosity impacts a patient's well being, their satisfaction with their care, and medical decision making. However, evidence demonstrates that medical professionals largely neglect this. I've got five areas I'm going to talk through and discuss the science behind spiritual engagement in the medical setting.

Now, what little disclaimer, you're about to see a whole lot of words on the slide. You're going to get access to this handout afterwards, and so please don't feel the burden to read every word you see or to write everything down. Take some notes on the handout you've got, but I really want you to listen and feel the impact of what I'm about to share.

So let's take a look at some of the science and evidence behind the question of, is spiritual engagement important? Let's start with everyone's favorite, Jayco. Jayco says yes. For those of you in the room who may not know who Jayco is, Jayco, also known as the Joint Commission, is an independent, non for profit group in the United States that administers accreditation programs for hospitals and other healthcare organizations.

Um, the commission develops performance standards that address the crucial elements of operations including patient care, medication safety, infection control, and consumer rights. So, yes, everyone hide your drinks, hide your snacks, Jayco is coming. Let's talk about him. But what does Jayco say about spiritual engagement?

Jayco actually requires healthcare organizations to include a spiritual assessment as part of the overall assessment to determine, uh, how a patient's spiritual outlet can affect his or

her care, treatment, and services. This spiritual assessment should at minimum determine the patient's spiritual practices, and any religious affiliations, but it doesn't stop there.

JACO has actually looked at the research and sees the value of incorporating this. The research has shown, and this was research done by JACO themselves, that when chaplains are involved in a patient's care, their satisfaction with healthcare, um, experiences increases. For example, a 2015 study reviewed nearly 9, 000 patient responses on six items from satisfaction surveys, yes, press Ganey, everyone's favorite, for Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.

Research found that chaplains had visited only 5. 6 percent of patients. However, those patients gave higher ratings for all six satisfaction items than patients who had not been visited by a chaplain. So in summary, JACO values a spiritual assessment so much that they actually require it for accreditation.

That's really huge when we think about it. What do the patients say? Well, the number's on the screen, but if I had asked you before you walked in, hey, if you went and polled all the patients in Dallas and hospitals right now, how many of them, what percentage do you think would say that spiritual engagement is important to their medical care?

Some research has shown that that number is up to 94%. Is there a single one of you who would have guessed it was that high? Probably not. 94%. That's huge. A 2015 meta analysis performed by the American Cancer Society study of cancer survivors found that spirituality was an independent predictor of better quality of life and emotional wellbeing.

A separate analysis of the same data found that faith contributed a significant A significant amount to cancer survivors functional quality of life with nearly 70% of participants reporting that religion and spirituality helped them through their cancer experience alternative. Alternatively, there is data that gives insight to the effects of unmet spiritual needs for patients experiencing advanced illness.

A New York study found that 73 percent of cancer patients reported having spiritual needs, but 18 percent of those said that their spiritual needs were not met. And of those patients with unmet spiritual needs, they reported overall lower satisfaction scores with their medical care. In one study by the Journal of Clinical Oncology, patients, their families, and clinicians were asked to rank seven different factors that were important to them when making treatment decisions.

This study found that for patients and their families, faith in God was number two. Number two. In contrast, however, clinicians ranked faith in God last, seven out of seven, as the least important. That really says something about this inverse relationship and view that we have of healthcare. And for those of you sitting there wondering, I know you are, what was number one?

What was the number one most important factor for patients when making treatment decisions? It was the medical recommendation of their oncologist, which seems fair. But right after that, right after the medical advice of their doctors was faith in God. That's huge. Recently hospitalized patients viewed being at peace with God and freedom from pain as the two most important elements of quality of life at the end of their life.

In contrast, other studies have found an association between spiritual pain and adverse physical and emotional symptoms. Things like increased depression, anxiety, and anorexia. There is also evidence that suggests there are better treatment decisions made when spirituality is a factor in a patient's medical care team.

This has resulted in greater hospice utilization, less aggressive interventions and less ICU deaths. In conclusion, there is significant research and data that tell us that spiritual engagement is important to patients and it's shown to have proven, uh, proven overall outcomes, um, on their overall care.

Well, now let's look at just some general statistics as well. Number three. Um, patients that have a high value of spirituality or religiosity in their life are shown to live longer lives. A 28 year study of over 5, 000 adults aged 21 to 65 found that frequent, meaning at least

once a week, attenders of religious services were 23 percent less likely than non attenders to die during a medical follow up period.

A nine year study of over 22, 000 adults age 20 and over found that the general risk of death for non religious attenders was 1. 87 times greater than for religious attenders. So simply including religiosity and spirituality in your life means you're probably going to live longer. If nothing else, that's worth celebrating.

But the statistics also show that patients with a high value of religiosity had fewer hospitalizations and shorter stays. They live healthier lives, they exercise more, they value proper nutrition, they're more likely to wear their seatbelts, they're more likely to quit smoking, and they're more likely to utilize preventative services, something I know we all advocate for constantly.

So the statistics show a high value of religiosity and spiritual, um, spirituality as well as religious attendance, that it has overall positive effects in a person's life. What does our heart say? Number four, spiritual engagement and care are shown to improve overall cardiovascular health and healthy living.

Research shows that those who incorporate spirituality and religiosity into their medical care have less cardiovascular disease. They're also shown to have lower blood pressures. Frequent attenders of religious services had consistently lower systolic and diastolic blood pressures than infrequent attenders.

Similarly, frequent attenders who engaged in private religious activities, things like prayer, were 40 percent less likely to have diastolic hypertension. Research shows that they will generally have better compliance with their medication, And then there was one study I found that showed, um, patients undergoing elective heart surgery who showed a lack of participation in social groups or a lack of strength or comfort from religion.

It was associated with three times a greater risk of death during their post operative period. So incorporating spirituality and religion can quite literally make a person's heart healthier.

I think I've also read something about that in another book somewhere. Maybe you've read that too. Reference, Bible.

What does the brain say? Research shows that spiritual engagement has positive effects on a person's mental health as well. There's less risk of depression and greater remission of depression. We see lower levels of generalized anxiety and anxiety in chronically ill patients. Patients with religiosity and spirituality are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.

And we see less suicidal ideation and attempt. I think we can all stop and agree that in today's world, we see a massive surge in both mental health issues and crises before us, um, just in the last four years alone. We know how those numbers have doubled. And so, this right here is huge. This is really important to consider.

And so, all this data is really helpful and really important, but I want to take a moment to acknowledge that this is looking at all religions and spirituality of all forms. And so what should we understand about this as Christians, as Christians, we've been told to feel ashamed about sharing our faith and that it has no place in a healthcare setting.

But all data is pointing back now to the immense value that it has. And more importantly, when we look at scripture, we see how God calls us to steward our bodies as we steward our faith. So I want to look at a few verses that remind us of this. One Corinthians six, it says, or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

You are not your own. You are bought with a price, so glorify God in your body. Romans 12 tells us, I appeal to you, therefore brothers, by the mercies of God to present yourself as the holy living sacrifice. Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. One Corinthians 10 says, so whether you eat or drink.

Or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. And first Corinthians nine says, but I discipline my body and keep it under control. Lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified. Therefore we should be confident going into healthcare, knowing

that our faith is actually helpful. It is helpful for the healthcare outcomes of those that we serve.

And this is not only based on the outcomes of these studies I've shared with you and the data and the science behind them, but this is based on how scripture emphasizes the value of caring for our bodies. So how should we respond to all of this? Three things I want to point you to. We want to try to stop transactional health care.

We want to learn to treat the body, soul and spirit, and we want to earn the right to be heard with our patients. So how do we stop transactional healthcare? We all know what that feels like. Patients come in, they feel like it's just a revolving door. Get them in and out as fast as you can. The more patients we see, the more we can build, the more profits we can make.

How do we fight against that in today's society? Dare to get to know your patient. They will know that we truly care about them. Or, I'm sorry, they will care about what we say if they first know that we truly care about them. And so I always say, hey, ask that one extra question that has nothing to do with their illness, nothing to do with what they've walked in today to be seen for.

Um, at the clinic at Skillman, we have the privilege to see a very large international and refugee population. And so oftentimes I'll say, hey, what brought you to America? I can't tell you how many times I'll hear, oh man, I was just looking for freedom. And I'll say, hey, what does freedom mean to you? Can I tell you what it means to me?

For those who are struggling, I'll say, Hey, do you have a support system? Who or what do you lean on in hard times? Can I tell you what I've found? Do you have a faith that helps you cope with your illness? Hey, can I tell you how mine has helped me through hard times? And just ask directly, Do you ever think about your emotional or spiritual health in the same way you think about your physical health?

So often we run day to day figuring out how to get rid of the aches and pains of our bodies, but not the aches and pains of our souls. How much do you stop to really think about what's going on? And then as we all know, there's always the opportunity to just offer prayer, but I want you to think and be intentional about how you do that.

There's a big difference in saying, can I pray for you? Which allows the patient to make a decision yes or no on what we're permitted to do versus saying, Hey, would it be beneficial to you if I prayed for you? That's what I always choose to say, because in that moment it forces the patient to stop and think, Hey, do I believe prayer is beneficial to me in this moment?

Would this be helpful? And if they say yes, hey, that yes has opened up a door to the reality that they understand that their spiritual health needs addressing as well. Slow down, be relational, dare to share your story of grace and how God has helped you through hard times. We want to treat the body, soul, and spirit.

That video you watched, um, just a moment ago before I started was, um, about our healthy homes. This is a handout Watermark Health has created that has been immensely helpful to us as we consider how to treat the whole human being in front of us. And this is a resource that's going to be made available to you as well.

And so, when you're caring for patients, see past the diagnosis. And see the person sitting in front of you. See them as a whole human being. Every single person you care for has innate dignity, value, and worth because they were created in the image of our creator. And so treat them as such. Point them to that truth.

Help them to understand that their health is not just about physical health. That their social health, their relationships with others, their mental health, and their emotional health are all equally important. And all four of those things have to be built on a foundation of a strong spiritual health.

And third, I want you to earn the right to be heard with your patients. So we talked about earlier that we know there's some barriers in healthcare. There's the cultural barrier that says, one, healthcare is not accessible to all, but neither is the gospel. Seek to change that. Remember that research has shown that patients want and value this.

Doing so will help patients place a unique trust in you. This is good news for those of us in healthcare. We know it's a very broken system, but we can create change. You want to deliver excellent medical care and maintain professionalism in doing so. Not only does this serve your patient well, but it glorifies God.

Your patients will see the Holy spirit at work in you by the way that you care for them with excellence. They will look to you and say, Hey, there's something different about you. The nurse I had last night. She, she didn't work like you. She didn't have joy like you do. What's different about you? My boss back there, Christy, knows many times I've heard a patient say, you're just so joyful and fun.

And she'll say, no, she isn't. Because I get to tell them, Hey, what you're seeing, it's not just me. I'm a broken person who has hard days and frustrations and all those hard things, but you're seeing Jesus at work in my life. Help them to see that by the way that you work with excellence. And then make the connection of the spiritual health to the physical health.

I always say there is a reason Jesus just didn't go around making tables throughout his entire ministry. He went around healing people. And that is because I believe there are a few things in this life that make a person more aware of their need for spiritual healing than their need for physical healing.

I want to give you a little example of an analogy that kind of just came out organically many years ago. I had a patient, he came in, he had fallen off a ladder or something and hurt his arm, thought he might've broken it. And so I'm doing his intake, engaging him, telling me the story of what happened.

I'm like, gosh, that sounds really scary. And he said, I know, I thought I was going home to meet my maker. And I said, tell me what you mean by that? Who, who do you mean by your maker? And he said, well, God. And I said, okay, well. When you go home to meet your maker, what do you think happens? Where do you go?

And he said, well, you go to heaven or hell. And I said, okay, so you're standing in front of your maker. What do you think? He would say, it's taken for you to get into heaven. What do you think you have to do to get there? He said, well, you follow the 10 commandments and live to be a good person. And I said, I hear that a whole lot.

And I think it's something I actually used to believe myself. But as I've trusted in Christ and as I've studied God words, I've learned, hey, I don't think that's what the 10 commandments is. Can I explain to you what it really is? And so I said, Hey, I want you to think of your current situation. You've had a fall and now something inside hurts telling you that something within is broken in the same way every person has had a fall and that is a fall from God's grace, a fall from our perfect relationship with him.

And now there are a lot of things telling us that something within is broken. All the pain, all the worries we feel point us to that same truth. And so when you break your arm, you come to the clinic and you get an x ray. You sit in that x ray machine, those radiographic waves, are they going to magically fix your arm?

Do they reset the broken bone inside? No. All an x ray does is reveal that something inside is broken. The Ten Commandments, God words, does the same thing. They were God's instruction to us for how to live, but He knew we could never fulfill it because we've all sinned and fallen short. So as we look to God's call for us, we realize, Hey, something within is broken.

I haven't done this well. And when you have a broken arm, what do you need? You need a good physician. You need someone who can come and bring healing to reset what is broken inside because you can't do it yourself. You're not a doctor. In the same way, the response to our broken relationships with God is that we need a great physician.

Someone who can come and bring healing to what is broken inside and that person is Jesus. And then I just got to insert the whole gospel of the life of Jesus. Seek to look for that moment of, hey, there is something going on with you physically. Here's how I can attach this to what's going, what's going on spiritually.

Look for those connections because they are everywhere. And when you forget, look to Jesus. Now, I said there were three things I wanted you to do to try to in response to this, but there's really one more I want to address and that's our fear. I think, um, most often what slows us down and keeps us from incorporating spiritual engagement into the medical care we provide is fear.

And so I want to challenge you to replace your fear with faith. Remember what Colossians 3:23 says, whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men. If you're worried, the organization you work for will punish you for caring for a patient's spiritual need, point them to all this information we just discussed and said, no, well, and just so you know.

I want to share a little bit of my experience when I worked in the hospitals. I went to my administrators and managers and said, Hey, am I allowed to, um, talk to my patients about faith or pray for them or engage them spiritually? And the response I got was, I mean, you know, if, yeah, if, um, patients want that, we have chaplains on site 24 seven, and so you can always call the chaplain.

And I said, I know, can I do it? And I got, well, you know, if, um, if the patients want, we have the chaplains. And, um, so, you know, yeah. And I said, so what I'm hearing is you're not telling me no. Great. Be willing to risk it all. Be willing to go to your managers and administrators and ask them about your policies and don't let a tiny little pushback or a little bit of a lack of clarity slow you down.

And for those of you in the audience, if you are the administrators, be willing to cultivate an environment where spiritual engagement is both beneficial and encouraged. Remember what Dr. McKinney just talked about. Be willing to risk it all for the sake of the gospel. These are just not lives we're talking about, but they're eternities.

Don't be ashamed of the gospel or its power. If you're worried for how a patient may respond, remember this. Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. First to the Jew, then to the Gentile. You are relying on God's power in that moment.

And so pray, pray and trust the Spirit. 2 Timothy 1, 7 says, For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self discipline. And when in doubt, look to the life of Jesus. This here Luke 6 is Watermark Health's mission verse. You've probably heard it if you've ever been around this organization for a little while.

And in it we see that people were coming from all over, many different places. And with that, Jesus came down and met them at a level place. He met them where they were at and he brought healing. The people came because they saw the power he held. Trust that you may be the vessel that God wants to use to bring that same truth to your patients.

Fear will slow you down. It's like we're driving on the highway and the speed limit is 60, but we're all going 20 because we're afraid. Dare to drive 59. Believe that the healthcare system that not only addresses a patient's physical needs, but also their spiritual needs, is proven to be beneficial to all aspects of health, healing, and overall well being.

Your faith is helpful, it is powerful, and it is important. So let me pray we'd be bold. Well Lord, working in healthcare is hard. Um, like all things in life, it is a system that is broken. And yet this information just gives us hope that healing is available. It gives us hope to know that people see the value of incorporating their faith into their overall wellbeing.

And so as we get up every day to go and to serve those that we care for, help us to have hands like Martha and hearts like Mary, ready to wake up and to serve, but only as we sit at your feet. Help us to be bold and unashamed of the gospel and trust that it is your power to save all who would believe.

God, it is a really unique gift to get to be a part of working in healthcare and to help save people's lives, but it is a much greater thing to be a part of saving people's eternities. Let us

not lose sight of that in the work that we do. Give us faith. Give us courage. We thank you for the opportunity that you have called us to this mission field.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.