Spiritual Salve

MOFFITT CHAPLAINCY CARE HONORED FOR EXPANDING REACH

By Cathy Clark and Ann Miller Baker

Photography: Rachel Lawrence
The son hadn’t even made it back to his home in north Florida when the call came through on his cell phone. It was Moffitt Cancer Center, where he’d just been visiting his dad. Things had taken a turn for the worse.

With the phone held to his ear for one final father and son talk, the patient took his last breath.

The fact that this emotional call even took place owes to the help of Moffitt’s Chaplaincy Care team. Manager Rev. Valerie Storms helped to track down the son and prepare him for the situation he was about to face. Not every interaction with the Chaplaincy Care team is as dramatic or poignant. But Storms says each interaction is vitally important.

For patients with cancer, physical pain is often accompanied by spiritual distress. Moffitt Chaplaincy Care can provide a salve for these spiritual wounds. Its five full-time board-certified chaplains (BCC), bolstered by another five as-needed chaplains and local clergy, all hold credentials in their own faith traditions. But like the health care professionals they work alongside, the chaplains have trained in their own specialty: listening skills and the ability to connect with patients on spiritual issues that accompany a cancer diagnosis. Interfaith in approach, Moffitt chaplains offer patients, family members and Moffitt team members opportunities to reflect on their spiritual concerns and to garner strength from their beliefs.

Rev. Storms, an ordained Baptist minister and past president of the Association of Professional Chaplains, says an important facet of the chaplains’ work is simply “being there.” Often just getting something out in the open can help a patient and their loved ones to face a difficult diagnosis, for example, and then reach out for necessary assistance and resources. Chaplains are trained and experienced in being available to facilitate conversations. And while chaplains willingly contact a leader within the patient’s faith upon request (including rabbis, priests, imams and other spiritual leaders), Rev. Storms says patients can find it helpful to speak with someone one step removed.

“Many times a patient prefers to talk to a hospital chaplain,” Rev. Storms explains, “because, not being part of their spiritual community, they feel more anonymous and often will open up and share things they otherwise would keep to themselves.”

The challenge is making sure patients and family members know that Moffitt’s chaplains are here to help in ways that reach beyond organized religion.

Last year, the Chaplaincy Care Department partnered with Supportive Care Medicine on a project called “In The Spirit.” Its aim was to improve delivery of spiritual care to inpatients referred to Supportive Care Services for palliative care at any stage of illness. Team members identified a spiritual care quality measure through collaboration with the Global Palliative Care Quality Alliance and initiated plan-do-check-act iterative cycles to monitor and improve outcomes. Revised electronic health record templates, standardized chaplaincy workflows and automatic referral processes were developed.

When filling out information upon admission, each patient is automatically asked if they have a faith connection and a note is made in the electronic health record. Patients are also informed that Moffitt chaplains make regular rounds through the units and can stop in to visit. Any patient being served in Supportive Care Services is automatically referred to Chaplaincy Care for a visit.

The “In The Spirit” initiative didn’t take long to generate results. At baseline in February 2014, 60 percent of SCS inpatients referred to the chaplains were visited and received a spiritual assessment within 24 hours of the referral. By January 2016, compliance rates for completed spiritual assessment for SCS patients within 24 hours of referral climbed to 100 percent. The compliance rate consistently continues to be between 90 to 100 percent.
NUMBERS GARNER KUDOS

In late February, team members across the institution gathered at the 2017 Spirit of Moffitt Awards. Seven teams in various categories were recognized for efforts that improved processes or services, increased efficiencies or positively impacted the work environment at Moffitt.

But only one team would walk away with the highest honor, the Nick Porter Award. Named for our now-retired executive vice president of Institutional Advancement and Corporate Relations, the Nick Porter Award is given to the team that best exemplifies Moffitt’s core values, persists despite obstacles and increases team member morale by acting as a role model to other departments.

Chaplaincy Care and Supportive Care’s “In The Spirit” initiative was named 2017’s Nick Porter Award recipient. But that honor is not the highest reward for their efforts. Rev. Storms says it can be found in the faces of the patients and families who find a path to some spiritual strength and comfort with help from Moffitt’s chaplains.

“The scientists and medical doctors work miracles with modern science and the latest treatments,” she says, “while the chaplains work quietly behind the scenes, tending to matters of the spirit and soul.”

For the patients and families served, it seems they are equally sacred callings.

Moffitt’s trained chaplains spend most of their time at bedsides, in waiting rooms or quiet spaces. But there is another spot always open for contemplation and prayer. Moffitt’s Interfaith Chapel is located on the first floor of the hospital on the Magnolia Campus, near the Publix Pharmacy.

For more information, call 813-745-2856.