

## I'm So Glad You Asked

By: Frank Harris

Research from the American Family Physician Journal has shown that many patients desire that their healthcare provider enquires about the role faith and spirituality plays in their ability to cope and on medical decision making. Consider the following findings:

- 456 outpatients at six academic medical centers found that in the ambulatory setting, 33 percent wanted their physician to inquire about religious beliefs, and 19 percent wanted their physician to pray with them.
- If dying, 70 percent would want their physician to know their beliefs, and 50 percent would want their physician to pray with them.
- A study performed at hospitals in North Carolina and Pennsylvania demonstrated that 77 percent of family medicine inpatients felt that physicians should consider their spiritual needs, and 48 percent wanted their physician to pray with them.
- Despite this, most ambulatory and hospitalized patients report that their physician never discussed beliefs with them, even though 85 to 90 percent of physicians felt they should be aware of patient spiritual orientation.

Some providers feel that they lack the training or time required to address the spiritual care needs of their patients. However, to not address this human dimension is to deny an opportunity to create better understanding of the patient and establish trust between the patient and medical team.

A helpful and non-threatening way to broach the topic of spirituality with patients is by using a spiritual assessment tool. There are several assessment tools available but one that is often used by MUSC chaplains is the C.A.S.H. spiritual assessment. By using this mnemonic device any care team member can ask 4 basic questions:

**Care:** What do I need to know to take good CARE of you today?

**Assistance:** Are there things in your life that offer ASSISTANCE in your ability to cope?

**Stressors:** What are the biggest STRESSORS in your life right now?

**Hope:** What are you HOPING for? (Or what are you most afraid of?)

Whether a provider offers direct spiritual interventions such as prayer or refers the need to a spiritual care expert, the outcome we seek is that the diverse spiritual needs of our community are recognized and respected.

Saguil A and Phelps K. 2012. "The Spiritual Assessment." American Family Physician 86(6):546–50. <https://musc.on.worldcat.org/oclc/813167555>