

New Competencies Address Professional Chaplains' Important Role in the Delivery of Palliative Care

California State University Institute for Palliative Care and HealthCare Chaplaincy Network Release Palliative Care Competencies for Professional Health Care Chaplains

New York, N.Y. & San Diego, Calif. (December 7, 2015) -- csupalliativecare.org The consistent delivery of evidence-informed practice in any discipline of health care requires the definition of competencies that must be met. Competencies define skills and attributes that staff, from physicians to dietary aids, are expected to meet in the daily performance of their responsibilities.

The California State University Institute for Palliative Care and HealthCare Chaplaincy Network (HCCN) have responded to the need for evidence-informed palliative care competencies required of professional chaplains who provide palliative and end-of-life care, by defining 11 competencies as well as three levels of progression. The competencies equip organizations and chaplains with a framework to respond to the National Consensus Project for Quality Palliative Care Clinical Practice Guidelines, which call for a board certified chaplain to be a member of the interdisciplinary palliative care team.

The 11 competencies encompass palliative care knowledge related to communication, counseling skills, teamwork and collaboration, spiritual assessment and documentation, ethics, delivery of care and continuity of care, cultural competence that incorporates inclusion and marginalized populations, care for other members of the team, and continuous quality improvement and research.

"The Palliative Care Clinical Practice Guidelines state that 'spiritual, religious, and existential issues are a fundamental aspect of quality of life for patients with serious or life-threatening illness and their families,'" said Rev. Eric J. Hall, HCCN's president and CEO. "These 11 competencies now define the skill set for the professional chaplain as the spiritual care specialist in palliative care."

Helen B. McNeal, executive director of the Institute, said, "The three levels of progression identified for each of the 11 competencies demonstrate the progressively more influential skills that professional chaplains can contribute to the care of the patient, as a team member and organizational leader. Each level – Foundational, Advanced, and Expert – builds systematically upon the other."

Components of what would become the 11 competencies influenced the development of two online professional education courses offered jointly by the two organizations: the Foundational level course Palliative Care Chaplaincy Specialty Certificate, introduced in 2013; and the Advanced level course Advanced Spirituality Practice in Palliative Care, which was introduced this year.

To date, 600 professionals have completed the Foundational course, which gets high marks. Chaplain John Valentino, Association of Clinical Pastoral Education supervisor and program coordinator of the Clinical Pastoral Education Program at Presbyterian Healthcare Services in Albuquerque, N.M., said the competencies taught in the Foundational course have had a profound impact at his institution. "One of the chaplain residents at the

hospital who completed the course was assigned to the palliative care team,” he said. “Due to her constructive contributions, the lead palliative care physician requested that a qualified full-time board certified chaplain be assigned to the palliative care team.”

A participant in the Advanced course, Chaplain Linda Vogel said, “I find myself drawing wisdom from some aspect of the course on a *weekly* basis. Now that is an outstanding, evidenced based outcome.”

A detailed list of the competencies and a one-page graphic summary can be found on the organizations’ websites <http://csupalliativecare.org/programs/chap-competencies/> and <http://www.healthcarechaplancy.org/professional-continuing-education/online-certificate-courses.html>).

About the California State University Institute of Palliative Care

The [CSU Institute for Palliative Care](#) offers palliative care-focused professional development and continuing education courses designed to enhance the skills of current and future healthcare professionals across the country and around the world. The Institute helps organizations and professionals achieve the palliative care skills needed to meet the growing needs of chronically or seriously ill people in all care settings.

About HealthCare Chaplaincy Network™

[HealthCare Chaplaincy Network™](#) is a global nonprofit organization that offers spiritual-related information and resources, and professional chaplaincy services in hospitals, other health care settings, and online. Its mission is to advance the integration of spiritual care in health care through clinical practice, research and education in order to increase patient satisfaction and help people faced with illness and grief find comfort and meaning—whoever they are, whatever they believe, wherever they are.