

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER



THEOLOGY OF ACCOMPANIMENT FOR HEALTH CARE LEADERSHIP

PREPARED BY THE ETHICISTS OF THE NCBC
FEBRUARY 2015

“Profession, vocation and mission meet and, in the Christian vision of life and health, they are mutually integrated. Seen in this light, health care assumes a new and more exalted meaning as ‘service to life’ and ‘healing ministry.’”
Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance, *Charter for Health Care Workers* (1995), n. 4.

❖ SUMMARY ❖

- While physicians and health care workers serve on the frontlines of “collaborating with God in restoring health to the sick body,” executive leaders in Catholic health care have an important and specific role to play in ensuring that such care can take place on a daily basis and for the foreseeable future. In overseeing and directing everything from budgeting to employment, from contracts to community benefit ministry, from the physical plant to policies and procedures for health care services, leaders in Catholic health care have the vocation and responsibility to ensure that the Gospel of Jesus Christ animates every aspect of the institution and its operations.
- Catholic health care leaders often manage multi-billion-dollar “enterprises.” These are nonprofit in the sense that profits are not distributed among shareholders. However, they must be run as profitable businesses or else the ministry cannot survive. (No margin, no mission.)
- Health care leaders must be familiar with and committed to the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* and make certain that their institutions are in compliance with them.
- However, Catholic health care leaders must be certain that their institutions are also in compliance with a host of local, state, and federal regulations, the requirements of accrediting agencies, the conditions of loans from lending institutions, etc.
- Just as there is both a distinction and a profound harmony between reason and faith, so are there distinctions and a need for harmony between the organizational, financial, legal, professional, and human elements of the modern health care institution and the elements of faith that transform the care offered there. Catholic health care leaders play a critical role in achieving this harmony.
- Catholic health care leaders must deal with often very significant competition from other health care systems in their service area that may not embrace the same values as those provided by Catholic health care. This competition sometimes places at risk the very survival of a Catholic hospital or system.

❖ FAQ ❖

Question 1. What is the extent of Catholic health care in the United States?

Reply:

- There are 642 Catholic hospitals across forty-five states, with some Catholic health care presence in all fifty states, even those where a Catholic hospital is not present.
- Catholic hospitals provide 119,096 beds in the United States. (Every sixth hospital bed in this country is Catholic.)
- They employ 644,755 full-time or equivalent workers.
- Over 5.4 million patients are admitted to Catholic hospitals annually.

Question 2. Does Catholic health care also reach those who are not admitted to its hospitals?

Reply: Yes. There are approximately 20 million emergency room visits to Catholic hospitals annually, and over 103 million outpatient visits to Catholic hospitals.

Question 3. Is Catholic health care present only in states with high concentrations of a Catholic population?

Reply: By no means. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, 13 percent of the population is Catholic, but 70 percent of acute care is provided by the Catholic Church. In Tennessee, 2.3 percent of the population is Catholic, but 20 percent of the population is admitted to Catholic hospitals. In Washington state, 11 percent of the population is Catholic, but 30 percent of hospital admissions are to Catholic hospitals. The percentages are the same for Oregon. In Alaska, 8 percent of the population is Catholic, while 30 percent of the population is admitted to Catholic health care institutions.

Question 4. How does the quality of health care in Catholic hospitals measure up against the quality in other hospitals?

Reply: Church-related hospitals “save more lives, release patients from the hospital sooner, and have better overall patient satisfaction ratings. ... [They] demonstrated significantly better results than for-profit and government hospitals on inpatient and 30-day mortality, patient safety, length of stay and patient satisfaction.” — David Foster et al., *Hospital Performance Differences*, 1 and 2.

❖ RESOURCES ❖

Catholic Health Association of the United States, *Catholic Health Care in the United States*, January 2014.

David Foster et al., *Hospital Performance Differences by Ownership*, Truven Health Analytics report, June 2013.

Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance, *Charter for Health Care Workers* (1995), Vatican website.