

Ochsner Health System

# The Institute for Medicine, Education, and Spirituality at Ochsner Health System

Holistic Healthcare with Peace of Mind

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**The Institute for Medicine, Education, and Spirituality at  
Ochsner Health System (IMESO)**

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**Spirituality and Holistic Healthcare**

A core realization has evolved over centuries of humanity's reflection on the human condition. It is that personal and communal well-being is dependent on the harmonic balance of body, mind, and spirit. This simple, but profound, realization is the core ingredient in the healing process, especially when one is faced with the challenging realities that are part of the human condition. The inclusion of the fertile ground found in spirituality will renew healthcare, today and into the future.

Commonly accepted public religions and the concomitant spiritualities include practices for living, thinking, and behaving. These spiritualities, influenced by codified and organized traditions and beliefs, contain the corporate and individualized wisdom about the depth and breadth of the human potential for well-being and offer assistance when facing the realities of life and death.

A spirituality results from the ability to delicately balance the ethical, religious, physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of living. The development for each person is built on the wisdom of integrated minds and hearts of men and women who seek the delicate balance of life and make a special effort to unravel the ultimate questions of life and death. This wisdom is revealed through

sacred writings and tradition: the collective wisdom of human beings as practiced and handed down through the ages. This is a spiritual intelligence or wisdom that individuals and communities seek to embrace in all cultures.

The care of one's health is a lifelong process and spiritual development is a part of that process. Acknowledging and supporting spirituality are essential for the well-being of the total person. The essence of each person's spirituality is the desire to find meaning and purpose and to be open to new enlightenment and wisdom. This constant and unrelenting search for spirituality results in the development of wisdom, courage, and hope. In turn, the search for spirituality, meaning and purpose, affects both personal and professional experiences in life and, ultimately, helps the person to face the reality of mortality. Thus, spirituality is at the core of living in harmony with others, with the self, and with the transcendent.

The Ochsner Health System supports holistic healthcare by providing the education and support necessary to keep people healthy in body, mind, and spirit. Ochsner understands that healing and well-being are enhanced by bringing together the wisdom of science and reason, together with compassionate care and spiritual support.

Holistic health professionals attempt to care for the whole person and not merely the part of the person, the illness. For illness has the power to change not only the person being treated, but also his or her family members, friends, and, ultimately, the treatment providers. It is for this reason that enlightened medical professionals not only

talk about the mechanics of disease and treatment of an illness with the patient, family members and caregivers, but also attempt to integrate the healing that comes from compassionate care. For illness and its treatment demand a radical look at all aspects of one's lifestyle, including spirituality and faith. Sharing the experience of illness and healing takes the patient and medical professional, willing or not, into the realm of spirituality.

This understanding of compassionate care is so important since it is now widely recognized that an understanding of the patient's spirituality enhances the process of healing and the acceptance of all that is involved with illness.

### **The Establishment of IMESO**

Several major academic hospital systems have established institutes for the study of religion, health, and spirituality. For example, George Washington University has developed the Institute for Spirituality and Health and Duke University has developed the Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health. Through scientific research, these institutions and many others have begun to find evidence for the positive relationship among religious behavior, spirituality, and well-being. From these research efforts, alliances have developed lists of spiritual competencies for health systems to implement.

The Ochsner Health System is well known for its quality in clinical practice, education, and research. To complement these advances in healthcare, Ochsner desires to enhance its holistic

healthcare practices with the inclusion of spirituality. In 2011, Ochsner initiated the Institute for Medicine, Education, and Spirituality at Ochsner (IMESO) to take holistic healthcare to the next level with the inclusion of spirituality into the practice of medicine and education. During its first year, IMESO was in a diagnostic stage of development, a type of grassroots movement, based on Ochsner's mission "to serve heal, lead, educate, and innovate." IMESO's director, with many volunteers, listened to medical staff, administration, employees, patients, and community members to collect the information necessary to develop a program of education and research for Ochsner.

### **Programs and Services of IMESO**

Now in its second year, IMESO supports and cooperates with existing programs and services, including those involving physicians, nursing, spiritual care, medical education, clinical research, bioethics, palliative care, staff, and administration. As a result of IMESO's diagnostic year, a strategic plan was developed for the life of the Institute so that it can be reproducible, sustainable, and self-sufficient.

These and other workshops will be offered to the staff and administration at Ochsner. Articles on the nature of spirituality as a lived experience, healthcare and self-transcendence, and the spirit of healthcare also have been developed for the instruction of all at Ochsner.

In the research realm, IMESO will offer research results in the areas of meaning and purpose at work (workplace spirituality), medical education and spirituality, and virtue development in healthcare

professionals. The Institute will be a leader in this research showing the value of including spirituality in the practice of medicine and education.

This work in the healing process holds great promise. It will help the Ochsner Health System to continue to fulfill its mission for patient-centered healing and thus fulfill its mission of service, healing, leadership, education, and innovation.

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