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Spiritual care services at children's hospitals in the United States of America

Servicios de atención espiritual en hospitales infantiles de Estados Unidos de América

Spiritual care, also known as spiritual support, pastoral care, or cure of souls, is a collaborative process applied to strengthen spirituality in a person by utilizing all available spiritual resources, including religious texts, chaplains, spiritual leaders, and communities, to become closer to his Creator and to create a positive relationship with Him.¹ Spiritual care is a growing type of healthcare which goes beyond biophysical and social needs and relates to patients' and relatives' existential and spiritual needs. Health professionals (e.g., nurses, chaplains, psychologists and medical doctors) often engage in interdisciplinary work with patients and relatives through dialogue about spiritual issues. Spiritual care is a particularly important aspect of rehabilitation, palliative care, and general practice.² Herein, we discuss the spiritual care services at children's hospitals in the United States of America (USA) to draw attention to the importance of spiritual care in pediatrics.

In this study, the list of children's hospitals in the USA was taken from Wikipedia.³ Today, there are a total of 224 children's hospitals in the USA. A detailed search was performed by using the keywords of: palliative care, spiritual care, spiritual support, and pastoral care at the website of the hospitals. Of 224 children's hospitals in the USA, 188 (84%) children's hospitals provide spiritual and/or pastoral care. In general, the spiritual care departments are an interfaith

support to patients, families and staff, whether they are religious or not. Professional health-care chaplains offer spiritual and religious care through counsel, connection, companionship as well as a support for religious rites and culture in the children's hospitals in the USA. For example; Boston children's hospital, one of the best 10 children's hospitals in the USA in the 2023-2024 honor roll, provides spiritual care services to Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim patients as follows: Protestant Bibles available by request, special offerings for Lent, Easter, and Christmas for protestant patients; Holy Communion ministers visit on inpatient units as requested, rosaries and Catholic Bibles available, tabernacle in the chapel for personal prayer and special offerings for Lent, Easter, and Christmas for Roman Catholic patients; Sabbath and festival arrangements, Sabbath candle lighting times, kosher food and refrigerators and Jewish Boston local events and resources for Jewish patients; and multi-faith chapel with direction to Qibla, open at all times for daily prayer, Boston prayer schedule, special offerings for Ramadan and other holy days, and additional Muslim resources available for Muslim patients.⁴ There are 128 medical faculties and hundreds of public hospitals in Türkiye as of 2024. Almost all of them have pediatric clinics, some of which are children's hospitals; however, none of them have pediatric spiritual and/or pastoral services.

Mexico is one of the countries with the greatest number of Catholics. Religion plays a central role for Latins including Mexican persons. In fact, most Latins believe in some form of Christianity, pray daily, and have religious objects prominently displayed in their homes.⁵ Reyes-Ortiz *et al.*⁶ reported that 60% prayed for healing, 49% asked others to pray for healing, and 69% considered spiritual healing as very important among Latinos including Mexican. Spiritual health and family functioning are significant protective factors against symptoms of depression and anxiety among adults from a sample of northeastern Mexico.⁷

The literature regarding spiritual care competencies in Latin America including Mexico is very limited. In the context of palliative care in Latin America, general spiritual care is provided by members of interdisciplinary teams.⁸ Espine *et al.*⁸ proposed six competencies for high-quality general spiritual care and their observable behaviors that every member of an interdisciplinary palliative care team should have to provide quality clinical spiritual care in their daily practice: (I) personal, spiritual, and professional development; (II) ethics of spiritual care; (III) assessment of spiritual needs and spiritual care interventions; (IV) empathic and compassionate communication; (V) supportive and collaborative relationships among the interdisciplinary team; and (VI) inclusivity and diversity.⁸ According to the best of our knowledge no pediatric spiritual care in hospitals in Mexico.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that spiritual care is an important component of holistic treatment in pediatrics because spirituality is an important part of suffering and the relief of pain and suffering. Many patients and families in many parts of the world are religious and/or spiritual beliefs and want their beliefs to be considered in healthcare. The vast majority of children's hospitals in the USA provide spiritual care, but no in many developing countries including Mexico and Türkiye. We strongly believe that pediatric

spiritual care departments should be established in developing countries, as in the USA model.

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