



A Contribution from Spiritual Health Victoria¹

A review of hospital safety and quality assurance in Victoria

Thank-you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion reviewing hospital safety and quality in Victoria.

At Spiritual Health Victoria (SHV) we believe that an effective healthcare system (one that is able to provide safe and quality care) is holistic and focusses with awareness on the whole person. It responds to the spiritual, emotional and cultural values and beliefs of people and communities as these are key determinants of health².

Spirituality³ is recognised as a factor that contributes to health and wellbeing in individuals. The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and societies. There is substantial data world-wide indicating that a focus on spirituality significantly improves patient health outcomes and improves quality of life. However, when this dimension of patient care is neglected likelihood of distress and the burden of illness is increased (Puchalski et al. 2014).

The need for cultural change within our health systems is evidenced by the deaths of seven babies in a culture that actively discouraged speaking out. It is seen in the existence of bullying and harassment in health care teams that must detrimentally impact the capacity to provide safe and quality care. Spiritual care⁴should be recognised as an integral and intentional component of the health system that contributes to the development of 'a just and trusting culture'.

Healthcare is about human interaction and connection: between patients, staff, clients, family, carers and friends. The quality of relationships and capacity to reflect on professional practice are core skills that need to be developed within the health sector. Nothing can replace a compassionate response where patients and significant others are treated with respect, dignity and as individuals

¹ Appendix 1 – About Spiritual Health Victoria

² Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019, p.19

³ A recent global definition for 'spirituality' has been stated in this way: Spirituality is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, and transcendence, and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred. Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions, and practices (Puchalski et al. 2014, p. 646).

⁴ Spiritual care is defined as a supportive, compassionate presence for people at significant times of transition, illness, grief or loss. Spiritual care is a collaborative and respectful partnership between the person and their health care provider. It is an integral part of holistic care. (Spiritual Health Victoria Inc. (2016) *SHV Spiritual Care in Victorian Health Services: towards best practice framework*).

with unique needs and concerns; where staff are courteous, patient and helpful. These are the natural by-products of attention to spirituality.

We must look beyond the technicalities that drive clinical intervention, yet rest at the heart of our efforts to provide the best outcomes, to address the human experience that traverses the greater healthcare journey. We too must then recognise that this human experience is not just on the patient, family or consumer side but is deeply significant for those who provide care or support the system every day. (The Beryl Institute, 2015)⁵

The World Health Organisation in 2007 called for the building of "trusted health systems that respond to ...needs in humane and holistic ways".⁶

A whole of organisation approach requires every employee, from executive level to ancillary support, to embody the values and ethos that they assert: they need to live out those values towards each other and towards those whom they serve. SHV has developed a training program for health services to build capacity for reflective practice, to promote staff wellbeing and to embed core values.

Conclusion

The focus on improving safety and quality of care for recipients of care within the health care sector is an important goal. In working towards the improvement of our healthcare system we need to remember that systems are about people and therefore dependent on the quality of relationships and communication at all levels. With the release of the Auditor-General's Report into Bullying and Harassment in the health sector, it is a timely reminder that safety and quality of care is not just about getting the systems right but about creating a caring culture that lives out the values so often expressed in our health service organisations: justice, respect, excellence and compassion.

Cheryl Holmes
Chief Executive Officer
Spiritual Health Victoria
ceo@spiritualhealthvictoria.org.au
(03) 8415 1144

⁵ The Beryl Institute (2015) *The Critical Role of Spirituality in Patient Experience*

⁶ World Health Organisation (2007) *People-centred Health Care: A policy framework*

Appendix 1 – About Spiritual Health Victoria

Spiritual Health Victoria (SHV) is the peak body enabling quality spiritual care across the health spectrum. SHV works in collaboration with spiritual care practitioners, faith communities and health services across Victoria and is supported by the State Government of Victoria through the Department of Health and Human Services.

Our core strategic intents are to:

- Build capacity and accountability for spiritual care to be delivered as an integral part of person centred care.
- Support faith communities, spiritual care practitioners and health services to provide comprehensive and quality spiritual care that addresses the spiritual care needs of the community.

We do this by:

- Working closely and collaboratively with State Government, faith communities, spiritual care practitioners and other service providers, health services, relevant organisations and agencies, Primary Health Networks, education providers and patients, consumers and carers.
- Developing a competent, skilled and accountable workforce.
- Supporting, developing, innovating and evaluating service provision in response to identified needs.
- Being a discerning, responsive, accountable and reflective organisation.

Spiritual Health Victoria (SHV) believes that when spiritual needs are recognised and responded to as an integral part of health care an essential contribution is made to the health and wellbeing of the community.

Further information about SHV can be found on the website www.spiritualhealthvictoria.org.au