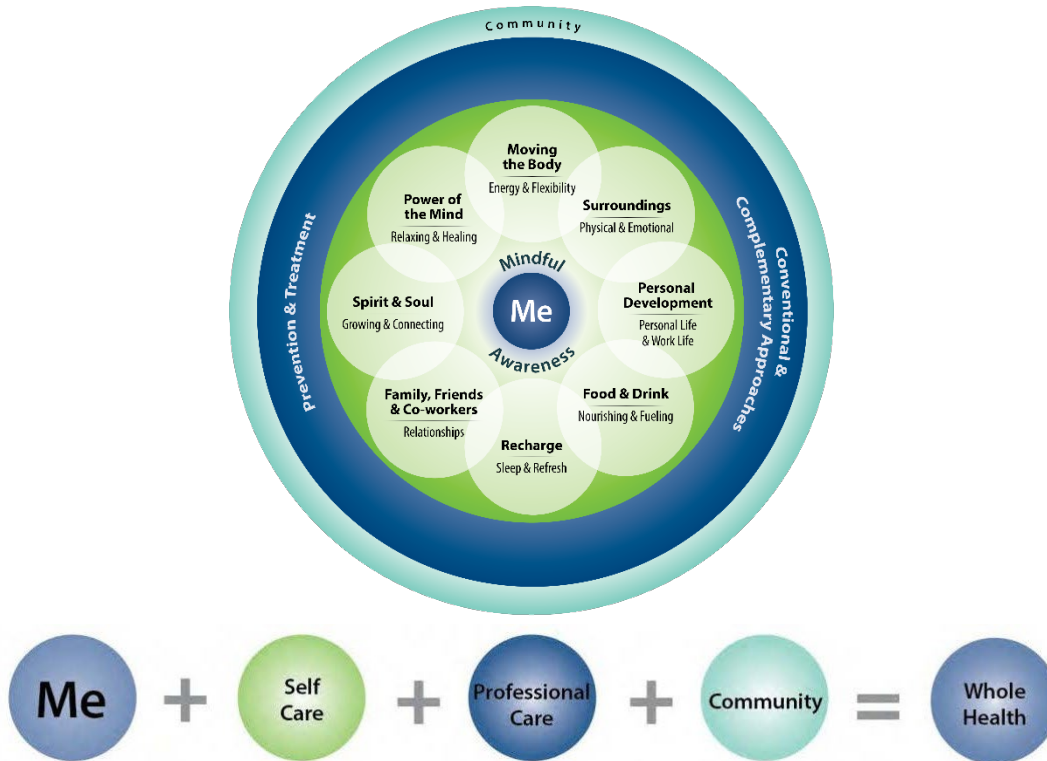


WHOLE HEALTH: INFORMATION FOR VETERANS

Chaplains



Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and enables YOU to take charge of your health and well-being and live your life to the fullest. It starts with YOU. It is fueled by the power of knowing yourself and what will really work for you in your life. Once you have some ideas about this, your team can help you with the skills, support, and follow up you need to reach your goals.

All resources provided in these handouts are reviewed by VHA clinicians and Veterans. No endorsement of any specific products is intended. Best wishes!

<https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/>

Chaplains

Who are chaplains?

Chaplains are part of the health care team. They are trained to help with the religious, spiritual, psychological, and social needs of patients, families, and hospital staff. They work in health care settings such as hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes.¹ Certified chaplains have gone through years of education and hands-on-experience. They have more training and experience in health care than clergy who work in the community. They are often connected with a particular faith, yet they work with anyone regardless of beliefs.

Chaplain services began in the United States in 1771 with an Army chaplain.¹ The VA started to have chaplains in 1865 under President Abraham Lincoln. Now, most of the health care centers in the United States have chaplains. There are chaplains available at the VA 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, especially during emergencies.

What do chaplains do?

Chaplains have many roles. They are available for both happy and difficult times. They put the patient and the family members first. The following is a list of some of the things they do.^{1,2}

- Listen to you and your family, respecting what you have been through
- Provide support to you and your family
- Help with decision-making
- Support difficult end-of-life decisions
- Help with advance directives. These are legal forms giving directions about your wishes for your health care. They are used if you become unable to make decisions for yourself due to a medical condition. You can learn more about advance care planning at the following VA website:
https://www.va.gov/geriatrics/guide/longtermcare/advance_Care_Planning.asp#
- Support and work with you to answer tough questions
- Perform religion-specific ceremonies or services, such as meditation, prayer, reading holy texts, observance of holy days, etc.
- Provide grief support. See the Whole Health handout “[Coping with Grief Following a Death](#)” for more information
- Assist with ethical concerns
- Communicate between the care team, you, and family members
- Assist with discharge planning and connect you with support, such as clergy members in your community
- Help honor the work you have done for your country
- Help with feelings of guilt and self-forgiveness. After leaving active duty, some people feel guilty about things they had to do during their military service. This may include things they would not have done during peacetime³
- Help you connect or reconnect with God or a higher power

How can chaplains help me?

Chaplains have a lot of experience in caring for people and their family and friends. They can spend time with you when other health care professionals are unavailable. They can listen and support you in the best way that works for you. Life can be full of many challenges, and chaplains can aid your journey. They can perform the roles listed above as well as many others. Chaplains often see patients for anxiety, alcohol abuse, depression, posttraumatic stress, guilt, and anger. They can also help with moral injury, the struggle Veterans might go through because they had to take actions in wartime that were not in keeping with their values and beliefs.^{4,5}

Research shows that when chaplains are involved in health care, people leave the hospital sooner and manage their pain and stress better.⁶

What if I'm not religious?

You can meet with a chaplain regardless of whether or not you belong to a religion, and no matter what your beliefs are.¹ Chaplains can provide social support and teach you coping skills. They can also help you determine what gives your life meaning and communicate your beliefs to the rest of your health care team.

What will happen when I meet with a chaplain?

In general, most chaplains will do an assessment when they meet with you. They will help you figure out any needs or in what ways they can be helpful.¹

Who should see a chaplain?

Anyone can benefit from seeing a chaplain. Meeting with a chaplain is entirely your decision. Decide what feels best for you. If you are admitted to a VA hospital, you should be asked a screening question: "Are there religious practices or spiritual concerns you want the chaplain, your physician, and other health care team members to immediately know about?" If your answer "yes," a chaplain will meet with you.² If you answer "no" or are just having a routine visit, you can ask to meet with a chaplain at any time.

How can I find a chaplain?

Chaplains are always available at VA facilities. You can call your local VA and ask for a chaplain consult. You can talk with your health care team at your next visit.

The website

<https://www.va.gov/chaplain/index.asp> can

help you find a chaplain close to you. It lists VA chaplains by state and city.

For you to consider:

- Do you think meeting with a chaplain could be helpful for you?
- When do you think you would like to meet with a chaplain?
- How do you think a chaplain could help you?

The information in this handout is general. **Please work with your health care team to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.**

For more information:

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
Veterans Health Administration	A variety of Whole Health handouts on the Spirit and Soul	https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp
Veterans Administration Patient Centered Care Website	Information about the VA Chaplain Services	https://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/index.asp
Veterans Health Administration	Brief video about VA Chaplain Services	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2csY4S7Zv8E&feature=plcp
Veterans Health Administration	Information on advance care planning and advance directives	https://www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/advance-care-planning-topics.asp
Veterans Health Administration	Article on Moral Injury	https://www.va.gov/HEALTH/NewsFeatures/2016/July/Talking_Spiritual_about_Moral_Injury.asp

This handout was written for the Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) by Mara Motley, MD, Academic Integrative Health Fellow, Integrative Health Program, University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. It is based in part on a tool for clinicians "Collaborating with Chaplains: Frequently Asked Questions" by J. Adam Rindfleisch, MPhil, MD. The handout was reviewed and edited by Veterans and VHA subject matter experts.

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