**A Chaplain And Medical Anthropologist Explain How You Can Spiritually Sustain Healthcare Workers During The COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Religion has been intertwined with caregiving for millennia. The [Good Samaritan](http://www.usccb.org/bible/luke/10), a common hospital name, references Jesus’s parable of the traveler who bound the wounds of a man who’d been attacked. Muslims consider that [healing is derived from divine intent](https://www.advocatehealth.com/assets/documents/faith/islamic_tradition.pdf), and that medical practitioners possess a unique responsibility placed on them by God. [Mt. Sinai, another familiar hospital name](https://www.aish.com/ci/sam/48944191.html), recalls the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments and where people had their ailments healed.

For those healthcare workers fighting the current pandemic, upcoming religious holidays can be a source of inspiration reminding all of us to do our part to protect healthcare staff in both body and spirit. Here are a few ways we can serve them.

**Lighten their load**: Health sector employees must care for COVID-19-afflicted patients while balancing other medical needs. Babies are still being born, heart attacks are still happening, and broken bones still require setting. A downward turn in our personal health could place additional demands on an overburdened workforce. So, we must take care of both ourselves and those around us. We can help ensure our neighbors with chronic conditions experience [no interruption in their care](https://doi.org/10.1089/hs.2016.0079), such as missing medications for want of a pharmacy trip, so they can avoid any acute episodes and an emergency room visit. We can practice physical distancing vigilantly, to stop disease spread and reduce the numbers of infected people who require in-patient care.

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One major thing we can do is changing how we worship – including finding creative alternatives to typically large Passover, Easter, Eid al-Fitr, and other gatherings – to show healthcare workers that their communities are thinking of them.

**Ease their minds**: Their families weigh heavily on the minds of the pandemic workforce. They are [afraid to bring any contagion home](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/03/25/coronavirus-er-doctor-essay/). Some have moved into the garage or [out of their](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/03/27/er-doctor-husband-apartment/) homes altogether to avoid exposing loved ones to the coronavirus. But some don’t have those options. [Childcare options are disappearing](https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/03/who-is-taking-care-of-hospital-workers-children/608848/) at a time primary care providers and hospital staffer are being called to work more often. Women populate [75% of health care practitioner](https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2018/pdf/home.pdf) and technical occupations and 87.1% of healthcare support occupations and are torn between obligations to patients and family. Family, neighbors, community groups, and faith congregations can relieve healthcare workers’ worry over not being home by offering meals, childcare, elder care, and pet care – or even just helping with the chores.

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**Steady their hand**: Providers are caring for patients infected with the novel coronavirus while [personal protective equipment (PPE)](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/health/coronavirus-masks-shortage.html) - and the sense of safety and self-confidence they confer – are in short supply. Healthcare workers may also be exposed to the virus in a variety of ways, ranging from generally being around the sick to performing [procedures that generate aerosols](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html) or ones where respiratory secretions are likely to be poorly controlled. To work fiercely on their patients’ behalf, without fear for themselves or their families, healthcare personnel need PPE. Businesses should search every corner for [appropriate supplies to share](https://www.businessinsider.com/how-you-can-help-donate-face-masks-doctors-nurses-coronavirus-2020-3), and the government must work tirelessly with industry to close this critical gap immediately.

**Revive their spirit**: Fortitude – the virtue that ensures firmness and consistency despite difficulties in the pursuit of the good – is what one provider posits as key to her [endurance and fidelity to caring](https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/opinion/im-providing-health-care-during-covid-19) for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pastoral workers, or even friends and family members, can help foster healthcare workers’ [spiritual fortitude](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-resilience/201901/resilience-and-spiritual-fortitude). Often, this just means being present. Listen well, ask questions, and show genuine interest in their experience. Support those who doubt and question. This may bear fruit for them and indicate a deep well of spiritual belief they may find accessible to themselves in the current situation. Avoid offering a quick fix. Also, sharing our own faith and convictions can help communicate to healthcare workers that no one is alone in this crisis. Even if we can’t be on the front lines with them, health sector employees can benefit from knowing that we care, and they are supported by our constant thoughts and prayers.

**Comfort their grief**: Pandemic-affected healthcare facilities are filled with heartbreaking experiences, and some decisions that healthcare workers find themselves forced to make can be unsettling. Because loved ones are not allowed to visit, some staff have watched patients deteriorate rapidly, knowing that the last[face that the patient sees](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/27/us/inside-hospitals-coronavirus-vignettes/index.html) is that of a stranger. Should patient demands outpace supplies of ICU beds and mechanical ventilators, providers face the [dilemma of who will receive lifesaving care](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/upshot/coronavirus-rationing-decisions-ethicists.html) and who won’t. These are situations where people need to feel grace and understanding. Spiritual leaders can be invaluable here by soothing potential [feelings of self-reproach and guilt](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/29/opinion/coronavirus-ventilators-rationing-triage.html) and offering a compassionate path forward.

Science and religion are a potent mix. As Martin Luther King, Jr., once wrote: “Science gives man knowledge which is power; religion gives man wisdom which is control. Science deals mainly with facts; religion deals mainly with values. The two are not rivals. They are complementary." During the pandemic, we can benefit from their intertwining by caring for healthcare workers as they apply their science to caring for the sick.

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