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WHAT'S G-D HAVE TO DO WITH IT?: RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY & PUBLIC SERVICE

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Project Interfaith



- ❑ Founded December 2005
- ❑ Leader and resource on interfaith and religious diversity issues based in Omaha, NE
- ❑ Mission: Grow understanding, respect and relationships among people of all faiths, beliefs, and cultures
- ❑ Vision: To create a community where people of all faiths, beliefs, and cultures are valued, included, and protected
- ❑ www.projectinterfaithusa.org

Programs



- Designed to appeal to diverse audiences
- Program tracks:
 - ▣ Arts programs
 - ▣ Community Conversations Annual Speaker Series
 - ▣ Trainings and workshops for professionals
 - ▣ Topical community programs

Defining religious diversity issues



What comes to mind when you hear the term
“religious” or “spiritual” diversity?

Religion vs. Spirituality

- **Religion** is a personal or institutional system grounded in a set of sincerely-held beliefs, values, and practices, based on the belief in and reverence for a supernatural being and/or on the teachings of a leader.
- **Spirituality** is generally recognized as encompassing experiential aspects, whether related to engaging in religious practices or to acknowledging a general sense of peace and connectedness. The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and is often considered to encompass a search for ultimate meaning through religion or other paths.*

*Definition from *Spirituality in Cancer Care: Health Professional Version*. Available online at:

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/supportivecare/spiritualityHealthProfessional>

What do we mean by religious diversity issues in a public service context?

- ❑ Religious/spiritual identity as another dimension of diversity
- ❑ Attitudes about religion and spirituality
- ❑ Understanding the First Amendment and the legal parameters of religion in public spheres (schools, public institutions, etc.)
- ❑ Demographics of community and world
- ❑ Accommodating religious and cultural practices in accordance with the law (including diet, modesty concerns, views and rituals connected to death and dying, etc.)
- ❑ Identifying credible resources and contacts on these issues
- ❑ Exploring intersection of religious and cultural identities and diversity
- ❑ Making our communities inclusive and safe for people of all faiths, beliefs, and identities including atheists and those who do not identify with a religious tradition



Religious diversity pop quiz

Identity exercise



What role does religion or spirituality play in your identity?

Ground rules



- Confidentiality
- Pass
- Listening, sharing and learning, not necessarily agreement
- Others?

Questions for discussion



- ❑ What is your reaction to the discussions you just had with your partners? What was this sharing process like for you?
- ❑ Have you ever considered these questions prior to this workshop? If yes, when have you discussed them and with whom?
- ❑ How significant is your religious background or affiliation as part of your identity?
- ❑ How might our own religious and/or spiritual identity and views affect our work with clients?

Remember:



- Often times, there is almost as much diversity in practice and belief *within* the religious traditions as there is *among* the different religious traditions.
- Emphasize this to your staff and encourage them to get to know the individual rather than making assumptions based on what is attributed to the group.

It may be legal, but is it inclusive?



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Strategies for creating inclusive facilities, organizations, and professionals

- At the facility and organization level:
 - ▣ Help staff identify credible resources and opportunities to learn more about religious and cultural diversity- i.e. Project Interfaith Training on Religious Diversity Issues in Public Service
 - ▣ Offer incentives for staff to continue educating themselves on religious and cultural diversity issues
 - ▣ Involve stakeholders when possible in developing policies, procedures, and practices about how religion should be included in the facility, how holidays will be treated, how requests by clients to practice their beliefs will be handled and other related issues.
 - ▣ Be proactive, not reactive
 - ▣ Make sure that staff are aware of facility or organization's policy on religious diversity, use of religious/sacred materials, and any other related issues

Strategies for creating religiously-inclusive facilities, organizations, and professionals (cont.)

- At the staff level:
 - ▣ Proactive communication with clients and family members/guardians is key
 - ▣ Provide check-in/feedback opportunities with clients and their family members/guardians
 - ▣ Avoid having clients “represent” their traditions
 - ▣ Use language that is inclusive of a variance of belief
 - ▣ Utilize tools for assessing client’s spiritual/religious and cultural needs (i.e. FICA, Hope Spiritual Assessment, etc.)
 - ▣ Take advantage of programs and resources to continue educating yourself about religious and cultural diversity

Spiritual Assessment/History

- Tool for understanding a client's religious, spiritual and/or cultural needs
- Many to choose from, no 1 perfect tool
- Should include the following:
 - ▣ Determination of client's spiritual needs and resources
 - ▣ Evaluation of the impact of beliefs on health, life, and service/medical outcomes and decisions (including preventative)
 - ▣ Discovery of barriers to using spiritual resources
 - ▣ Encouragement of healthy spiritual practices

Spiritual Assessment/History (cont.)

□ Limitations:

- No one tool can give full picture of individual
- Language of assessment may inadvertently guide outcome and/or limit usefulness
- Only helpful if information is integrated into overall service or care plan and staff have developed skills to use effectively

FICA*

- F- Faith and Belief
 - ▣ Do you consider yourself spiritual or religious?
 - ▣ Do you have spiritual beliefs that help you cope with stress?
- I- Importance
 - ▣ What importance does your faith or belief have in your life?
 - ▣ Have your beliefs influenced how you take care of yourself [in this illness]?
- C- Community
 - ▣ Are you part of a spiritual or religious community?
 - ▣ Is this of support to you and how?
- A- Address in Care
 - ▣ How would you like me, your care giver, to address these issues in your care giving?

*Adapted from “FICA-Taking a Spiritual History” (Puchalski, 1996) available online at www.gwish.org/id69_m.htm

HOPE Spiritual Assessment*

- **H: Sources of hope, meaning, comfort, strength, peace, love and connection**
 - We have been discussing your support systems. I was wondering, what is there in your life that gives you internal support?
 - What are your sources of hope, strength, comfort and peace?
- **O: Organized religion**
 - Do you consider yourself part of an organized religion?
 - How important is this to you?
- **P: Personal spirituality and practices**
 - Do you have personal spiritual beliefs that are independent of organized religion? What are they?
 - Do you believe in G-d? What kind of relationship do you have with G-d?
- **E: Effects on medical care and end-of-life issues**
 - Are you worried about any conflicts between your beliefs and your medical situation/care/decisions?
 - Are there any specific practices or restrictions I should know about in providing your medical care? (e.g., dietary restrictions, use of blood products)

*Adapted from "Spirituality and Medical Practice: Using the HOPE Questions as a Practical Tool for Spiritual Assessment" (Anandarajah & Hight, 2001).

Available online at: <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20010101/81.html>

Helpful resources to get started

- Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life
 - <http://pewforum.org/>
- Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty
 - <http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=3979>
- RE Online
 - <http://www.reonline.org.uk/>
- Patheos
 - <http://www.patheos.com/>
- Project Interfaith
 - www.projectinterfaithusa.org

Questions to consider:



- ❑ What issues in terms of religious diversity are you seeing or do you anticipate seeing in your organization or community?
- ❑ What is your reaction to the strategies listed?
- ❑ Which do you think make the most sense for you to incorporate?
- ❑ What other strategies do you think would be helpful for creating an environment that is inclusive and sensitive to the needs of religiously-diverse staff and clients?

Thank you!



- Please let us know how we at Project Interfaith can help:
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