

## **Manifesto for the Interfaith Coalition in Health and Spirituality**

The participants are a group composed by healthcare professionals and religious leaders that have met in the House of Reconciliation (Casa da Reconciliação) on May 9, 2015, with the purpose of ascertaining the possibility of spiritual support to hospitalized patients, their families and collaborators. The group has agreed upon the following:

The health care should always contemplate all the human dimensions, what includes the spiritual dimension. This dimension encompasses transcending of significance elements, purposes and connectivity, and is as much important for the quality of life as the physical, mental and social dimensions.

Many people express their spirituality through their formal religions or their traditional faiths. Others still strengthen their spiritual dimension with non-religious elements, as the practice of ethical actions or the contact with nature.

Science holds an extensive documentation on the positive association between the religious-spiritual well-being and several parameters of the physical and mental health. Clinical researches also highlight the importance of the religious-spiritual support in the treatment for the recovery of health. The Health World Organization itself has several documents that emphasize it.

Faith is still more important in high fragility situation, as during a hospitalization. The perspective of the disease, of the disablement and death tend to awake the fear, the feeling of impotence and the idea of finitude. Faith can light up positively these realities, assigning to them a sense of transcendence, being thus a source of comfort, hope and strengthening. All the health institutions should see the human being beyond the disease and the treatment of the body, searching for all possible kinds of compensation of the spiritual shortages of the patient.

We understand that there are several ways to offer support to these needs and to the sustainment of the faith. The hospital experience can be humanized in several ways, as environmental comfort and empathic professionals. The psychosocial intervention is critical to the emotional balance and, also, in many cases, to the need for spiritual support.

The spiritual support can be offered by a specific religious denomination, be it ecumenical, inter-religious or inter-faith. It can also be offered by religious ministers or by specially prepared volunteers, by chaplain in service of the institution or by external visitors. These visits can be occasional (by request) or regular (agreement with a congregation).

There is a need for the organization of the resources, so that the proper spiritual support occurs in as many as possible health institutions. Although there are uncontested elements of the importance of the faith in the health, the support initiatives still occur in a timid and slowly way, because all the knowledge is fragmented and dispersed.

In some health institutions, their administrators are still groping in the ways of spiritual assistance, so that it can be achieved in a constructive way. There is fear that the presence of religious or volunteers disturbs the clinical routine, as non-requested proselytism and disturbance of the procedures. In some cases, this fear is justified by remnants of negative past experiences.

On the other hand, there is impairment in the adequate training of spiritual ministers by the religious traditions for the attendance in hospitals, as well as knowledge for a productive interaction with health professionals and with the patients and their family. A visit in this condition is excluded from all clinical treatment. This improvisation very much limits the benefits which could derive from the spiritual support.

Knowing these needs, the participants proposed the creation of the **Inter-faith Coalition in Health and Spirituality**. We intend to build ways to improve the understanding of the interface health-spirituality, acting in the tripod assistance, teaching and research. We foster the exchange of experiences and competences to point out paths capable of overcoming the current obstacles. We will suggest ways of fulfilling the lacunas related to the spiritual support to patients in hospital, families and collaborators.

The group will meet from time to time to propose actions to its participants and to sectors of the society that are available to benefit from it, as health institutions, religious congregations and government agencies.

**Inter-faith Coalition in Health and Spirituality** recognizes all the historical religions, the legally constituted and the faith traditions with ethical and universal values. When there are respect and opening, the interchange of these precious values is possible.