

## BOOK REVIEWS



**Linda S. Golding and Walter Dixon, *Spiritual Care for Non-Communicative Patients: A Guidebook* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2019), 93 pp.**

The guidebook is a succinct foundational resource for chaplain students who are learning the art of visiting non-communicative patients. Providing spiritual care to non-communicative patients can present a range of conundrums for a chaplain. Among the questions this guidebook addresses are how to introduce oneself, how long to stay, how to deal with self-consciousness in the presence of others on the medical team, how to navigate between interacting with family members and the patient when both are in the room, when to speak and when to remain quiet, when to offer touch and when not to, and when to pray out loud and when to pray silently.

The origins of this resource are a didactic given to chaplain interns and residents, as well as medical students and nurses, at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. The authors expanded on this didactic in a presentation they made in 2016 at the “Caring for the Human Spirit Conference” in San Diego. The book includes material directed specifically to the students themselves as well as content oriented more toward educators and facilitators.

The authors choose to employ the word “non-communicative” to refer to the patient who is “unable to be in dialogue in the ways we usually employ to interact with others—through speech, writing, and non-verbal actions” (12). They suggest that “non-communicative” is a more broadly descriptive term than “non-responsive” or “comatose.” The book succeeds in affirming how important it is that chaplains “broadly” consider ways of how best to serve this population. To aid in building skills, the authors stress

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the importance of becoming a keen observer—of self, the environment, the other members of the medical team, family members, and, of course, the patients themselves. They provide reflective tools and exercises in each chapter to encourage cultivation of self-awareness and awareness of surroundings. They also offer tools for considering various interventions and ways of being with patients.

After addressing more tangible skills, the authors present a chapter called “The Spiritual Heart of the Visit: How to Discover It.” They offer this wisdom:

There are many ways to identify spiritual connection even amid the cacophony and visual chaos of the hospital ICU: the stillness or hush in the room, a deep sadness or joy, a reduction in extraneous noise in the mind, a sense of suspended time, self-consciousness turning into self-awareness, and increased focus outside of the self, a tingle. (56)

Overall, this short book offers ample guidance on its subject to health-care chaplains, particularly students and novices. It inspires spiritual care professionals to cultivate the essential awareness, skills, and heart for compassionately ministering to those who are non-communicative.

Susan Freeman  
Sharp Health Care  
San Diego, California