Components and Roles in Health Ministry

Health & Wellness Ministry – Many faith communities have or are developing an organized health ministry that addresses the health of the community inside and outside their walls. Because health ministry sees health holistically, it often seeks to find common ground among other ministries, such as social justice, hospitality, and youth ministries. A health ministry reflects the faith community and its members, so its structure, style, and activities will vary. However, all health ministries are most effective when they are actively supported by clergy and other leaders. Effective ministries also meet regularly to discuss and plan health activities, programs, and services that benefit the congregation as well as the community. A sample of health ministry activities may include support groups, speakers on specific topics, visitation ministries, health education, and advocacy efforts.

Health Ministers - Health ministers play a key role in health ministry. Health ministers are unique in that their backgrounds and experiences vary, even between health ministers in the same faith community. Some are healthcare professionals, barbers, stay at home parents, lawyers or accountants. They can be health navigators, wellness coaches, outreach workers, health educators, health ambassadors, or promoters de salud. What is most important is that a health minister believes in the importance of holistic health and in the role of faith communities in improving the health and wellness of the community. Often, they are part of a health and wellness ministry/team. Some may work alone while others may work with faith community nurses to organize, plan, and evaluate health ministry activities.

Faith Community Nursing - The American Nurses Association, working with the Health Ministries Association, approved a new registered nurse certification program for Faith Community Nurses. Faith Community Nursing, formerly known as parish nursing, is a process for active licensed registered nurses to obtain a specialty practice certification by portfolio beginning in 2014. Some of the key roles of a faith community nurse may include health education, health counseling, referrals, health ministry team coordination, and volunteer coordination. Faith community nurses, like health ministers, are key members of a health ministry team, though in some faith communities, they may work independently of a health ministry team.

Faith Community Health Network Models

Hospital/Primary Care-based - With the Affordable Care Act, healthcare legislation emphasizing population-based care and improved continuity of care for patients, hospitals and health care providers have an increased incentive to reach out and build connections with their local community. One method of building such connections is through a hospital-based faith community health network. In a network, a hospital or hospital system and local faith communities work collectively to improve continuity of care, identify health care needs, build and strengthen resources, and increase training and educational opportunities for faith community members, with the ultimate goal of improving the health of the local community. Hospital-based network models work well for a hospital or hospital-system with a strong commitment to sustaining community connection and/or a chaplaincy or pastoral service department with strong community ties.

Community-Based – In a community-based faith community health network, a group of individuals representing faith communities within a particular region meet regularly to discuss successes and challenges, provide support for each other, advocate for faith communities in the health care environment, and share resources, such as upcoming educational opportunities related to health and wellness. Local community organizations and faith groups may also be members. Participants share a common goal of coordinating faith community and health promotion efforts to address health disparities. The members of the network self-determine their own goals, objectives, and mission.