

# Is Anyone Unaffected by the Pandemic?

*Spiritual Care Association's CEO:  
Chaplains Can Play Key Role in Reaching  
Out to Those Suffering*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- "As the national death toll edges past 100,000 it is becoming increasingly clear to me that the human impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers does not stop at frontline clinical caregivers. It permeates the entire institution," said The Rev. Eric J. Hall, CEO of Spiritual Care Association and HealthCare Chaplaincy Network.



The Rev. Eric J. Hall

He continued, "I hope we understand that our doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists and other clinicians at the front lines are experiencing an unprecedented, relentless flow of severely ill and dying victims of the virus. Nothing has prepared them for this. They are not military medics deployed in a warzone. If they were, they would be prepared to see crisis, trauma, and loss of life at significant levels. Certainly our healthcare professionals have always experienced traumatic events, but the consistent, daily reoccurrence of so much human suffering is unique and brings unique challenges. I am

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*The Rev. Dr. Eric J. Hall*

trusting that the physical and emotional health of these clinicians is top of mind for hospital administrators. It should be.

"In the last couple of weeks, I have heard from two people at opposite ends of the healthcare hierarchy. One is a highly placed executive in a major New York City hospital. He is well educated, well trained, his wall full of framed diplomas, certificates and awards. His work is essential to the running of the hospital, but in the C suite, he is physically removed from the battles going on in his facility's ICUs. Yet, he confided in me that he is unnerved by the emotional impact of so much sickness and death all around him. When he goes home each evening, he leaves behind the real

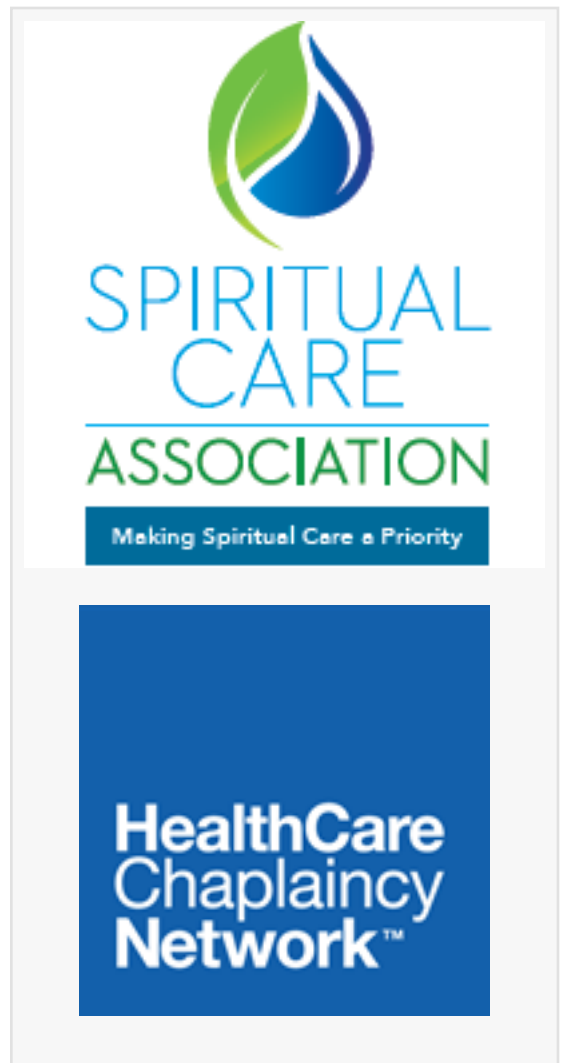
life and death struggles going on in the hospital beds, but he carries with him the no less real human struggle to make sense of the world in which he lives.

"The second person who talked to me about the pandemic's impact is a janitor who works in a healthcare facility in the Bronx. Over his years of service, he has been no stranger to cleaning up blood on the floor after a trauma patient has been admitted to the ER or taking out stained and soiled trash from the OR after a major surgery. Usually, trauma and death come one or two patients at a time. But, he told me, nothing had prepared him for mopping the floors around dozens of gurneys containing bodies waiting to be rolled out the back door to refrigeration trucks parked outside.

"No one who signed up to work in our nation's healthcare facilities ever imagined they would be involved with unrelenting sickness, death, and dying every day for 8, 10, 12 weeks -- with no real end in sight. We hear on the news that new cases of coronavirus are diminishing in hard hit places like New York, Massachusetts, Washington, and the San Francisco Bay area. Yet infection rates continue to rise in Texas, Alabama, Georgia and elsewhere even as states begin to relax stay-at-home orders and companies of every kind start cautiously opening for business. Meanwhile, the nation's top medical experts warn about a possible surge in cases this summer and fall followed by a bleak winter season.

"There are no bystanders as this disease rages on. No one was ready for it and no one is unaffected by it. As the English poet John Donne wrote 400 years ago, 'Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.'

"I am worried about the unseen, unrecognized and untalked about toll the pandemic is having on healthcare workers who are not at the front lines. Everyone who works in healthcare is caught in the coronavirus riptide, not just those who provide hands-on care for the sick and dying. From the C suite to the janitor's closet, other people are suffering emotionally and spiritually from the human impact of the disease. I wonder who they are unburdening themselves to at the end of the day. Who is sitting with them to debrief their feelings and emotions? Who is listening to them as they try to put into words the ways in which they too have been traumatized? Who is taking care of them as they struggle to make sense of things no one has prepared them to handle? Who is encouraging them to set aside their titles and job grades to simply acknowledge their humanity? Who assures the CEO, the security officer, the kitchen worker, the maintenance engineer that they are not being weak, just human? If we wait until this



is all over to reach people like this, it will be too late. No one can be sure how traumatized, how damaged people will be emotionally and spiritually by the time we get to the other side of the pandemic.

"Chaplains can play a key role in reaching out to those suffering hidden, collateral damage from working within a system that is overwhelmed by the relentless stream of sick and dying people who enter our institutions of health every day. Ready to bring a compassionate presence and an open, listening heart either in person or online, chaplains are the medics of the soul, dispensing emotional and spiritual first aid to any and all who need it. From the boardroom to the back office, the kitchen to the housekeepers breakroom, chaplains are as comfortable caring for employees who work there as they are ministering to their clinical colleagues on the front lines.

"HealthCare Chaplaincy Network and the Spiritual Care Association, both of which I oversee, are in the business of preparing professional chaplains for a moment such as this. Please reach out to us if you need help, no matter what your title is or where you fit in the hierarchy. You'll find plenty of free resources to help you cope with feelings and emotions you are experiencing at [www.spiritualcareassociation.org](http://www.spiritualcareassociation.org). And if you need to speak in confidence with a chaplain, please visit our website at [www.atimeforcompassion.org](http://www.atimeforcompassion.org).

We are here for you, no matter who you are."

Molly Sabala

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