

Approaches to Health Ministry

There is no one way to do health ministry. Congregations take many different approaches. Here are some of the models that other congregations have used, just to give you an idea of the scope of health ministry. There is no limit, however, to what congregations can do as they assess the needs of the membership and of the community and uncover the resources and gifts available to address those needs. Come up with some new models!

The Health Cabinet

The Health Cabinet model assumes that health ministry is already a part of the life of the faith community. Congregations usually have programs that attend to the wellness of their members and the people in the community, but may not have an intentional focus on healing. Worship, religious education, youth group activities, lay visitation programs, prayer chains, social outreach and action initiatives, etc. are all part of a health ministry.

In this model, forming a health cabinet gets the congregation to talk more explicitly about the role of healing the congregation plays and to make some decisions about how this emphasis will be incorporated. The Health Cabinet is an umbrella group that promotes health and wellness in the congregation. It is not a "provider" of health programs, but a partner with other committees and boards to ensure that the health focus is part of all areas of church life. Everyone is part of the healing movement.

Resource

Jill Westberg-McNamara. *The Health Cabinet: How to Start a Wellness Committee in Your Church*. 1997. Available through the International Parish Nurse Resource Center at Deaconess Parish Nurse Ministries, 475 East Lockwood Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63119. (314) 918-2559 <http://www.parish-nursing.org/>

Mutual Support/Community Building

The focus of the mutual support model is not generally programmatic. The model starts with the idea that health is rooted in the quality of people's relationships with one another. Mutual support programs find ways to build community and to facilitate congregational members deepening their relationships with each other. The assumption is that as people share together in meaningful ways about their life experience, those issues that impact a person's overall well-being will be heard and addressed.

Some congregations see the community building approach as a way of laying a foundation for further programs around health and wellness. Others see it as an end in itself. Often it's a place to start and things emerge from it that you can't even imagine at the outset. People sharing their stories, reaching out to one another and exploring the implications for their lives is powerful. The important thing is to design something that will work well in your context and to be responsive to the unexpected.

Resource

The Church of the Brethren's Association of Brethren Caregivers has an excellent program called *Lafiya*, from the west African Housa greeting, meaning "health and wellbeing." This program is

no longer supported by the Church of the Brethren, but materials describing the program are available in the Advocate Health Care Health Ministry Library. To access, contact Olga at 847-384-3513 or olga.wegehaupt@advocatehealth.com.

Faith Community Nursing (formerly Parish Nursing)

Faith Community Nursing is a health promotion, disease prevention role based on the care of the whole person and encompassing seven functions. These functions are: integrator of faith and health, health educator, personal health counselor, referral agent, trainer of volunteers, developer of support groups, and health advocate. This nursing role does not embrace the medical model of care or invasive practices such as blood drawing, medical treatments, or maintenance of intravenous products. It is a professional model of health ministry using a registered professional nurse. The focus for the practice is the faith community and its ministry (McDermott & Burke, 1993).

Faith Community Nurses revitalize the mission of health in the congregation by:

- Being an integral member of the ministerial staff
- Networking the congregation with community agencies
- Encouraging members of the congregation to be more active partners in the management of their health resources
- Communicating the relationship between faith and health
- Promoting health through the age span and to all socio-economic groups.

Resource

International Parish Nurse Resource Center at Deaconess Parish Nurse Ministries
475 East Lockwood Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63119, (314) 918-2559 <http://www.parish-nursing.org/>

Lay Health Promoters/Community Health Workers/Promotoras de Salud

Lay Health Promoters are members of a local congregation or community who are trained in basic health promotion skills. They volunteer their services to provide information about health care, monitor those who are chronically ill and encourage healthy lifestyles among members of the congregation. They also serve as the "health care connection" between members of their congregation and health care services in the community. This is a ministry of listening and teaching. Lay health promoters do not need to have any medical training or background. People who are natural helpers and who are respected by their fellow members are the kind of people who do well in this position.

Most lay health promoter programs are community oriented. The goals are to promote health in the congregation and in the surrounding community. Often these programs operate on a coalition model. A group of congregations in the community choose members to be trained as health promoters. These people work together on health issues that impact their congregations and also reach into the community to address common concerns.

Resource

CHW Local Network, 1436W. Randolph St. 4th Fl., Chicago, IL. 60607. For more information, contact Laura Bahena at 312.878.7015 / lbahena@healthconnectone.org or Alfredo López at 312-878-7016 / alopez@healthconnectone.org. <http://chwnetwork.wordpress.com>.

Care and Counseling

Many congregations already have strong care and counseling programs. Examples of a program in this model would include Stephen Ministries, Eucharistic Ministers and Ministers of Care, Pastoral Counseling Centers.

In this model, volunteers from the congregation are trained to provide supportive, spiritual care to those in the congregation who are shut-in, experiencing grief or loss, chronically ill, disabled, hospitalized, etc. The model empowers laity to carry out the ministry of the church of healing and comfort to those in need and to bring the symbols of the church to the hurting individual. These powerful ministries offer volunteers an opportunity to grow in their own faith and skills while providing a deep sense of caring and concern within the church.

A program that has been particularly successful is the Support Team Network. In this approach, a group of people provides support to a person with a chronic illness, disability or special need. The group can be made up of congregation members, family, friends, neighbors, etc....Regular, brief meetings keep the team on track and provide opportunities for spiritual growth and skill development. This model encourages volunteers to offer to do things they like to do and to set limits on time and resources that they will put toward the ministry, thereby reducing volunteer attrition. A national network offers support and consultation.

Resource

Stephen Ministries. 2045 Inner Belt Business Center Drive. St. Louis, Missouri 63114-5765. 314.645.5511. <http://www.stephenministries.org>

Support Teams: University of Alabama at Birmingham. Contact Malcolm Marler, Director of Pastoral Care, 205-934-3936 or mmarler@uab.edu for more information.

To see videos about Support Teams: <http://uabpastoralcare.org/supportteams/all-support-team-videos/>

For a Guidebook on how to set up Support Teams:

<http://uabpastoralcare.org/supportteams/support-team-development-guidebook/>

Healing Practices

In some congregations interested members receive training in various healing techniques—massage therapy, meditation, guided imagery, Reiki, healing touch, movement or art therapy, etc.—and offer healing sessions for members of the congregation and community.

Faith Based Coalitions

Some projects work through coalitions of congregations and community organizations that come together around particular needs. The group may choose to serve the terminally ill, older adults,

people with HIV/AIDS, families with children with disabilities, people with chronic illness, etc....

Coalition approaches can look very different depending on the particular mix of partners. Some may utilize volunteers to provide a set of services such as transportation, yard work, home repair, child care, meal preparation, etc. Others may become politically active and work for legislative change or to change the way in which services are provided. Some may focus on community-wide education events, health fairs, or other health promotion activities.

This can be an ambitious approach, but one that has worked well in hundreds of communities around the country.

Resource

The Interfaith Health Program (IHP), Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University. 1256 Briarcliff Road NE, Building A, Suite 107, Atlanta, GA 30306. 404.727.5246. www.ihpnet.org

Health Centers

Some congregations have the resources and capacity to build direct service health clinics that serve the uninsured, immigrants, the homeless or other marginalized populations. Often they do this in partnership with other congregations or with health organizations. This is an ambitious model that requires a clear vision, strong leadership and organizational skill. Components of this approach might include affordable clinical care, health promotion programs, mobilization of volunteers and services, community health assessment, or public action around access issues.

Even though it's a large undertaking, there is a significant community of faith-based health centers in the country that are addressing critical health needs.

Resource

Christian Community Health Fellowship (CCHF), 2595 Central Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee 38104. 901.271.6400 or info@cchfmail.org. www.cchf.org