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Integrating Clinical Pastoral Education into Multidisciplinary Healthcare Teams: A Framework for Holistic Patient Care

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Abstract

The integration of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into multidisciplinary healthcare teams presents a transformative approach to holistic patient care. While modern healthcare emphasizes medical and psychological well-being, the spiritual and emotional dimensions of patient health often remain under-addressed. CPE-trained chaplains and spiritual care providers play a critical role in bridging this gap by offering compassionate support, crisis intervention, and ethical guidance. This review explores the significance of integrating CPE into healthcare teams, emphasizing its benefits in enhancing patient-centered care, improving interdisciplinary collaboration, and fostering the well-being of both patients and healthcare providers. A structured framework for effective integration is proposed, highlighting key components such as institutional commitment, role definition, interprofessional training, and outcome measurement. Challenges to integration, including resistance from healthcare professionals, institutional barriers, and resource limitations, are also examined alongside potential solutions such as policy advocacy and evidence-based approaches to spiritual care. Additionally, case studies of successful CPE implementation are presented to illustrate best practices and the tangible impact on healthcare delivery. By embedding CPE into multidisciplinary teams, healthcare institutions can promote a more holistic model of care that addresses the biopsychosocial-spiritual needs of patients. This integration not only enhances patient satisfaction and recovery but also strengthens resilience among healthcare professionals, reducing burnout and fostering a more compassionate clinical environment. Future directions include expanding CPE training programs, increasing research on spiritual care's efficacy, and advocating for policy changes that support interdisciplinary collaboration. This study underscores the necessity of recognizing spiritual care as a fundamental component of comprehensive healthcare, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of patient care in diverse medical settings.

Keywords: Integrating Clinical, Pastoral Education, Healthcare Teams, Patient Care

1. Introduction

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is a program designed to provide spiritual care training to individuals seeking to become professional chaplains or pastoral counselors (Hanson, 2023). CPE is an experiential education process that emphasizes the development of pastoral skills in a clinical setting, focusing on real-world interaction with patients, families, and healthcare providers. The program involves reflection on spiritual issues, ethical dilemmas, and the personal growth of the chaplain-in-training (Oluwafemi *et al*., 2023) [33]. Historically, CPE emerged in the mid-20th century in response to a growing awareness

that spiritual and emotional well-being are crucial components of comprehensive healthcare (Hanson *et al*., 2024). Today, CPE is a well-established practice, integrated into hospitals, hospices, and long-term care facilities worldwide. In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on holistic patient care, which acknowledges the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual health (Toromade *et al*., 2024). The traditional medical model, which primarily addresses physical symptoms, has evolved to incorporate a more comprehensive approach, recognizing the importance of addressing emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. This shift is particularly important in palliative care, mental health settings, and long-term care, where patients often face not only physical ailments but also existential distress, grief, and uncertainty about the future (Oluwafemi *et al*., 2024) [32]. In this context, the role of CPE-trained professionals in healthcare teams has become more vital than ever, offering spiritual and emotional support for both patients and their families.

One of the primary reasons for integrating CPE into healthcare teams is the growing recognition of the importance of addressing the spiritual and emotional dimensions of health (Hanson *et al*., 2024). Numerous studies have shown that spiritual care is directly linked to improved patient outcomes, including enhanced coping skills, reduced anxiety, and a greater sense of meaning and purpose. Patients facing chronic illness, terminal diagnoses, or mental health struggles often experience spiritual distress that cannot be alleviated solely through medical interventions. Pastoral care, offered by CPE-trained chaplains, helps patients navigate their emotional and spiritual struggles, offering a sense of comfort, peace, and dignity during difficult times. Integrating CPE into healthcare teams enhances patient-centered care by ensuring that all aspects of a patient's well-being are addressed (Toromade *et al*., 2024). Patient-centered care emphasizes individualized care plans that respect and respond to each patient's unique needs, values, and preferences. By incorporating CPE, healthcare teams can ensure that patients receive comprehensive care that attends not only to their physical health but also to their emotional and spiritual needs. This integration fosters a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach where healthcare providers, chaplains, and family members work together to improve the overall well-being of the patient (Hanson, 2023). It also facilitates improved communication between patients and care teams, offering patients an avenue to express their fears, hopes, and values that might otherwise be neglected in the clinical environment.

This review aims to explore the significant role that Clinical Pastoral Education plays in multidisciplinary healthcare teams, particularly in the context of holistic patient care. By examining the integration of CPE into these teams, the review will highlight the value of spiritual care in the overall health outcomes of patients. The goal is to provide a framework for integrating CPE effectively into healthcare settings, outlining the responsibilities of pastoral care providers, healthcare professionals, and administrators in creating a spiritually supportive environment. Additionally, the review will identify the challenges associated with integrating CPE into healthcare teams. These challenges include institutional barriers, such as lack of funding for chaplaincy services, resistance from healthcare professionals who may not fully understand the importance of spiritual care, and difficulties in addressing the diverse spiritual and religious needs of patients. By exploring these obstacles, the review will also propose potential solutions, such as training healthcare professionals in spiritual competencies, promoting interprofessional collaboration, and ensuring adequate resources for spiritual care services. Ultimately, this review seeks to underscore the importance of incorporating Clinical Pastoral Education into the multidisciplinary healthcare model, offering insights into how spiritual care can be effectively integrated to improve patient care and enhance the overall healthcare experience for patients and their families. By recognizing the significance of spiritual health, healthcare teams can offer more compassionate, comprehensive care that aligns with the holistic needs of patients.

2. Methodology

A systematic review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology was conducted to evaluate the integration of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into multidisciplinary healthcare teams. The review aimed to identify best practices, benefits, and challenges associated with implementing CPE in clinical settings to enhance holistic patient care.

A comprehensive search strategy was developed and applied to major medical, theological, and psychological databases, including PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The search covered peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2024, using keywords such as "Clinical Pastoral Education," "spiritual care in healthcare," "interdisciplinary pastoral training," and "holistic patient care." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search results, ensuring relevant studies addressing the integration of CPE into multidisciplinary teams were included.

Studies were screened using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria encompassed empirical research, case studies, and systematic reviews examining CPE within healthcare settings, its role in interdisciplinary teams, and its impact on patient outcomes. Studies focusing solely on chaplaincy services without a structured CPE framework, as well as those unrelated to healthcare integration, were excluded. The initial search yielded 3,200 studies, which were screened for duplicates, relevance, and methodological rigor. After title and abstract screening, 540 studies remained, of which 120 were assessed in full text. Following a critical appraisal using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), 48 studies met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

Data extraction was performed using a structured coding framework to collect information on study design, sample size, healthcare settings, integration strategies, and measured outcomes. Thematic synthesis was used to identify key trends related to the implementation of CPE in healthcare teams. Results highlighted that integrating CPE enhances communication between chaplains and medical professionals, improves patient-centered care, and fosters emotional resilience among healthcare staff. Barriers identified included resistance from medical staff unfamiliar with pastoral care, lack of standardized policies, and funding constraints.

Findings suggest that successfully integrating CPE into multidisciplinary healthcare teams requires institutional

support, structured training programs, and collaborative frameworks between healthcare providers and spiritual care practitioners. Standardizing CPE curricula, increasing research on its impact, and advocating for policies that recognize the importance of spiritual care in clinical settings will further enhance holistic patient care.

2.1 Understanding Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is an educational program that equips individuals with the necessary skills to provide spiritual care in a healthcare context (Okonkwo *et al*., 2024) [31]. Unlike traditional seminary education, which often focuses primarily on theological knowledge, CPE places an emphasis on the practical application of pastoral skills in clinical environments such as hospitals, hospices, and long-term care facilities. The aim of CPE is to prepare spiritual care providers, including chaplains and pastoral counselors, to offer compassionate and effective spiritual support to individuals experiencing health crises, terminal illness, or emotional distress. The core principles of CPE revolve around the integration of personal reflection, theological education, and hands-on clinical experience. CPE is based on the belief that pastoral care is a deeply relational and experiential process. Therefore, the program encourages self-awareness and spiritual growth in the chaplain-in-training, helping them reflect on their own faith, values, and responses to suffering and death. The program also emphasizes the importance of providing care that is compassionate, culturally competent, and respectful of the diverse spiritual and religious backgrounds of patients, families, and healthcare teams (Hanson *et al*., 2023). These principles guide chaplains in their roles as agents of support, healing, and comfort in the face of illness and suffering.

CPE training is designed to develop a range of competencies that enable spiritual care providers to respond effectively to the spiritual, emotional, and existential needs of patients and families. The training process includes supervised clinical practice, personal reflection, and academic study, allowing chaplains to hone their skills in various areas of pastoral care (Toromade *et al*., 2024). Some of the key competencies developed through CPE training include. A fundamental aspect of CPE training is the development of spiritual assessment skills, which enable chaplains to identify and understand the spiritual needs of patients. Spiritual assessments allow chaplains to explore the beliefs, values, and concerns of patients and their families. This may involve asking open-ended questions about their religious or spiritual practices, understanding how their illness affects their sense of meaning or purpose, and addressing existential questions related to life, death, and suffering. Effective spiritual assessment is crucial to providing personalized care that respects each patient's unique worldview and fosters a sense of spiritual peace and well-being (Attard *et al*., 2021) [6]. In palliative care and other healthcare settings, patients and families often face acute emotional and spiritual crises. CPE training emphasizes crisis intervention techniques that chaplains can use to support individuals who are dealing with trauma, grief, or profound distress. Chaplains learn how to provide immediate emotional support during critical moments, offer a compassionate presence, and help individuals navigate feelings of fear, anger, or confusion. Counseling in these settings often goes beyond offering religious advice; it involves listening actively, providing empathy, and helping individuals cope with the complexities of life-threatening illness or imminent loss. CPE equips chaplains with the tools to engage in non-judgmental, compassionate conversations that foster emotional resilience in the face of crisis (Desjardins and Redl, 2022) [11]. CPE training also focuses on developing interpersonal communication skills, which are critical for building trust and rapport with patients, families, and healthcare professionals. Chaplains learn how to communicate with sensitivity and respect, especially in situations where patients may be experiencing pain, grief, or confusion. Effective communication is essential not only for providing spiritual care but also for collaborating with other members of the healthcare team. Ethical considerations play a significant role in pastoral care, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues such as end-of-life decisions, cultural differences, and religious beliefs that may conflict with medical practices. CPE training provides chaplains with a framework for navigating these ethical challenges in a way that honors the dignity of the patient and the values of all involved parties (Ali *et al*., 2022) [3].

The role of chaplains and spiritual care providers extends far beyond offering religious services or prayers. In multidisciplinary healthcare settings, chaplains serve as essential members of the healthcare team, addressing the emotional, spiritual, and existential aspects of patient care (Adegoke *et al*., 2022) [1]. Their responsibilities include supporting patients, families, and healthcare staff, providing comfort during times of illness and loss, and helping individuals find meaning and hope in difficult circumstances. Chaplains provide essential emotional and spiritual support to patients, helping them navigate the challenges of illness, suffering, and death. They listen to patients' concerns, offer prayers or religious rituals when requested, and provide a space for patients to express their fears, hopes, and spiritual questions. For families, chaplains offer guidance and comfort during the difficult process of caregiving and anticipatory grief. They also assist family members in making informed decisions about care, ensuring that the patient's spiritual and cultural preferences are respected. In addition to their work with patients and families, chaplains support healthcare staff by offering emotional and spiritual care to those who are regularly exposed to suffering and loss (Nnagha *et al*., 2023) [30]. Healthcare workers can experience burnout, compassion fatigue, and moral distress, and chaplains provide a safe space for them to process their emotions and receive spiritual guidance. This support helps staff members to maintain their own emotional well-being, which is essential for providing high-quality care to patients.

Chaplains work closely with physicians, nurses, social workers, and other healthcare providers to deliver holistic care that addresses the full spectrum of a patient's needs. Their role in the healthcare team is to ensure that the spiritual, emotional, and psychological dimensions of care are not overlooked. Chaplains collaborate with medical professionals to ensure that patient care plans are sensitive to the spiritual values and preferences of patients. In cases of ethical dilemmas or end-of-life decisions, chaplains provide a voice for the patient’s spiritual perspective, advocating for care that aligns with the patient’s values. Their unique training in navigating spiritual and ethical issues allows them to contribute to difficult decision-making processes, fostering an environment of mutual respect among all members of the healthcare team. Clinical Pastoral Education

(CPE) plays a critical role in preparing spiritual care providers to offer compassionate and effective support to patients and families in healthcare settings. Through training in spiritual assessment, crisis intervention, and communication skills, CPE equips chaplains with the competencies necessary to address the complex emotional and spiritual challenges faced by patients in palliative and other clinical contexts (Matthew *et al*., 2024). Chaplains' roles as integral members of healthcare teams help ensure that patients receive holistic, patient-centered care that attends to their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. By integrating CPE into healthcare teams, institutions can provide a more comprehensive approach to care that supports both patients and healthcare professionals in navigating the complexities of illness and death.

2.2 Multidisciplinary Healthcare Teams: Composition and Functions

Multidisciplinary healthcare teams are composed of a diverse range of professionals, each bringing a unique set of skills and expertise to address the complex needs of patients. The composition of these teams ensures that patients receive comprehensive care that goes beyond the traditional medical approach. Key members of multidisciplinary teams include, Physicians are at the core of healthcare teams, responsible for diagnosing medical conditions, prescribing treatments, and overseeing the overall care of the patient (Al Hasan *et al*., 2024) [2]. Their role is crucial in managing the medical aspects of patient care, such as administering medications, conducting surgeries, and coordinating with other healthcare providers to ensure that treatment plans are followed effectively. Physicians also collaborate with other team members to make critical decisions regarding patient care, particularly in cases involving complex or chronic conditions. Nurses play a vital role in patient care, providing direct, hands-on assistance and monitoring patients' progress. Nurses are responsible for administering medications, assisting with daily activities, and ensuring patient safety and comfort. They are often the first point of contact for patients and are key in assessing patient needs, communicating with physicians, and ensuring the implementation of treatment plans. Nurses also provide emotional support and education to patients and families, helping them understand medical procedures and conditions. Social workers address the psychosocial aspects of patient care, helping patients and families navigate the challenges associated with illness, hospitalization, or chronic conditions. They assist with the social and emotional aspects of care, providing counseling, facilitating communication between patients and healthcare providers, and helping patients access necessary resources. Social workers also address concerns related to financial issues, legal matters, and family dynamics, ensuring that patients and their families receive the necessary support in coping with healthcare-related challenges. Psychologists are essential members of multidisciplinary teams, particularly in addressing the mental health and emotional well-being of patients. They provide therapeutic interventions to help patients cope with stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues related to illness. Psychologists also conduct assessments to understand the emotional and cognitive aspects of a patient's condition and work with other team members to develop a comprehensive care plan that integrates psychological support (Matthew *et al*., 2024). Chaplains bring a spiritual dimension to healthcare teams, offering pastoral care to patients and families in need of spiritual or emotional support. Their role includes providing comfort during times of illness or end-of-life care, helping patients navigate existential questions related to suffering and death, and offering religious rituals and prayers. Chaplains collaborate closely with other healthcare professionals to ensure that spiritual care is integrated into the overall treatment plan, supporting the patient's sense of hope, meaning, and dignity. Their ability to address spiritual distress is essential in ensuring holistic care for the patient. Depending on the setting, multidisciplinary teams may also include other professionals such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, pharmacists, and speech-language pathologists. These professionals contribute to patient care by addressing specific aspects of health and well-being. For example, physical therapists help with rehabilitation and mobility, while dietitians create nutrition plans that support recovery. Each team member's specialized knowledge enhances the overall care provided to patients, creating a collaborative approach that addresses all aspects of health.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is at the heart of the multidisciplinary healthcare team model, and it is integral to improving patient outcomes. The collaborative nature of these teams allows healthcare providers from different disciplines to combine their knowledge, skills, and perspectives to address the complex and diverse needs of patients. The following points highlight the importance of this collaboration, One of the primary benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration is the enhancement of patient outcomes. By drawing on the expertise of a diverse team, patients receive a more holistic approach to care that takes into account not only their physical health but also their psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs (Hanson *et al*., 2024). Collaborative care ensures that all aspects of the patient's well-being are addressed, improving overall health outcomes and quality of life. Moreover, interdisciplinary collaboration helps reduce the risk of medical errors, as multiple healthcare professionals review and contribute to treatment decisions. Regular communication and coordination between team members can help prevent gaps in care, misdiagnoses, and unnecessary procedures. This collaborative approach results in more efficient and effective care delivery.

A key feature of multidisciplinary teams is their ability to address the biopsychosocial model of healthcare, which recognizes the interplay between biological, psychological, and social factors in a patient's health. Traditional healthcare models often focus solely on the biological aspect, primarily treating physical symptoms. However, interdisciplinary teams take a more comprehensive approach by considering the psychological and social factors that influence health. Multidisciplinary teams ensure that these concerns are addressed by involving social workers, psychologists, and chaplains who provide psychosocial and spiritual support. By considering the emotional and social aspects of the patient's life, the team helps improve the patient's ability to cope with their illness, enhance their mental well-being, and support their families throughout the treatment process (Toromade *et al*., 2024). Furthermore, addressing spiritual needs is a critical component of holistic care. Spiritual distress can have a profound impact on a patient's emotional well-being, and chaplains play a vital

role in offering support that helps patients find meaning and comfort in their experiences. Spiritual care, as part of a holistic approach, not only alleviates suffering but also promotes a sense of peace and resilience during difficult times.

Multidisciplinary healthcare teams are essential for providing comprehensive, patient-centered care that addresses the full spectrum of patient needs. The collaboration among physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, chaplains, and other professionals ensures that patients receive the necessary medical, psychological, and spiritual support to navigate the complexities of illness (Hanson *et al*., 2024). The integration of various perspectives and expertise leads to improved patient outcomes, greater patient satisfaction, and a more holistic approach to healthcare. As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, fostering effective interdisciplinary collaboration will remain a cornerstone of providing quality care to diverse patient populations.

2.3 The Case for Integrating CPE into Healthcare Teams

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) offers a unique framework for spiritual care, playing an increasingly important role in healthcare settings. CPE integrates chaplains trained in pastoral care into multidisciplinary healthcare teams, enriching the care provided by addressing the spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs of patients and healthcare staff (Holdsworth, 2024 [21]; Toromade *et al*., 2024). This integration not only enhances patient outcomes but also improves the overall functioning of healthcare teams. The case for incorporating CPE into healthcare teams is grounded in its ability to address a variety of needs across patient care and staff support.

The emotional and spiritual dimensions of patient care are often neglected in traditional medical models, which tend to focus primarily on the physical aspects of illness. However, patients experiencing serious illnesses, trauma, or life-threatening conditions often face existential crises, anxiety, and questions related to the meaning of life, suffering, and death (Yager, 2021) [50]. These emotional and spiritual challenges can significantly affect their overall health and recovery. Chaplains, trained through CPE, are uniquely positioned to address these aspects. They provide a safe and nonjudgmental space for patients to explore their spiritual and emotional concerns. Spiritual care delivered by CPE-trained chaplains can help patients process feelings of fear, guilt, loneliness, and despair, offering comfort and guidance through religious rituals, prayer, and emotional support. Moreover, chaplains provide a holistic approach to care, recognizing that patients' spiritual well-being is just as crucial as their physical health. This personalized approach can reduce patient distress and contribute to a more positive care experience, enhancing both the quality of life and the quality of care provided.

Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful healthcare teams, as it ensures that all members are informed, collaborative, and aligned in their treatment goals. When a chaplain is integrated into a healthcare team, they can serve as a mediator or facilitator of communication, particularly in challenging situations. Chaplains also contribute to fostering a more open and inclusive dialogue among the healthcare team members. They bring a unique perspective, ensuring that the spiritual needs of patients are not overlooked in the decision-making process. By engaging in regular interdisciplinary rounds and consultations, chaplains promote an integrated approach to patient care, ensuring that spiritual, emotional, and physical needs are considered together. The presence of chaplains on healthcare teams allows for more comprehensive discussions and decision-making, improving the overall collaboration among healthcare providers (Szilagyi *et al*., 2022) [40]. Moreover, chaplains can act as vital liaisons between patients, families, and the healthcare team. When patients are facing a life-threatening illness, they may struggle to communicate their spiritual and emotional needs with other healthcare providers. A chaplain's role in translating these needs into actionable care plans helps bridge the gap between the clinical and emotional aspects of care. As a result, CPE integration fosters better teamwork, as the chaplain plays a central role in maintaining a holistic care approach.

Integrating CPE-trained chaplains into healthcare teams enhances the overall patient experience, which has a direct impact on patient satisfaction. Patients who feel that their spiritual and emotional concerns are heard and addressed report higher levels of satisfaction with their care. In many cases, these patients also experience improved psychological and physical outcomes, as their concerns about suffering, death, and meaning are alleviated through spiritual care. Studies have shown that patients who receive spiritual care in addition to medical treatment tend to experience lower levels of anxiety and depression, higher levels of resilience, and an enhanced sense of well-being. This sense of well-being is particularly important in critical care or end-of-life settings, where patients face distressing circumstances. Chaplains can provide a sense of peace, helping patients find comfort, meaning, and dignity in their healthcare experience, which improves their overall outlook and coping ability. Additionally, the integration of CPE into healthcare teams helps ensure that patients' needs are addressed in a more comprehensive, empathetic, and personalized manner, making the patient feel valued beyond just their physical symptoms.

Healthcare professionals often work in high-pressure environments, where they encounter stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout. They regularly face difficult situations, such as delivering bad news, managing life-or-death decisions, and witnessing patient suffering. This can take a significant toll on their mental health and resilience. While training and peer support are essential, healthcare workers often overlook their own emotional and spiritual well-being, focusing entirely on the care of their patients. CPE can help address these issues by providing healthcare professionals with access to pastoral care and spiritual support. Chaplains can serve as emotional and spiritual resources for staff members, offering counseling, prayer, and a confidential space to reflect on their experiences (Brady *et al*., 2021) [8]. Additionally, chaplains can facilitate debriefing sessions or support groups, where healthcare workers can discuss the challenges they face and share coping strategies. By fostering resilience among healthcare workers, CPE helps reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction, ultimately enhancing the quality of care provided to patients. Moreover, chaplains contribute to creating a supportive work environment, where healthcare providers feel valued and cared for. This holistic approach to staff well-being leads to better team morale, increased job satisfaction, and improved patient care outcomes.

2.4 A Framework for Effective Integration of CPE

The integration of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into healthcare teams is an essential component of holistic patient care. Spiritual and emotional well-being are integral to overall health, especially for patients undergoing serious medical treatment or facing end-of-life decisions. CPE provides a structured approach for chaplains to offer spiritual support within multidisciplinary healthcare teams (Hanson *et al*., 2024). However, for the successful integration of CPE into healthcare settings, several key elements must be considered, including organizational commitment, training, role clarification, collaboration, and the measurement of outcomes. This framework outlines these key components and emphasizes their importance in creating an environment conducive to spiritual care and enhanced patient outcomes.

The successful integration of CPE into healthcare teams begins with organizational commitment. Healthcare institutions must recognize the importance of spiritual care in achieving holistic patient well-being and integrate it into their mission, values, and policies. This involves acknowledging that physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions all contribute to the health of a patient and should be addressed comprehensively within the healthcare setting. Developing organizational policies that support spiritual care is essential. These policies should outline the role of chaplains within the healthcare team, ensuring that chaplains are included in patient care planning, interdisciplinary rounds, and decision-making processes. Additionally, policies should advocate for the availability of spiritual care services to all patients, regardless of their background or beliefs (Toromade *et al*., 2024). This commitment can be demonstrated by allocating appropriate resources to spiritual care, including staffing CPE-trained chaplains and providing them with necessary tools and training. Furthermore, leadership support for the integration of CPE ensures that spiritual care is not seen as an ancillary service but as a core component of patient care.

For CPE integration to be effective, healthcare providers need to be educated about the importance of spiritual care and the role of chaplains within the multidisciplinary team. While many healthcare professionals are trained to treat the physical aspects of illness, they may lack the skills or awareness to address the spiritual and emotional needs of patients. A foundational element of successful integration is providing training and education on the value of spiritual care and the practical ways to collaborate with chaplains. Training programs should include both formal education for all healthcare providers and specialized training for chaplains. Healthcare staff should receive orientation on how to identify and address spiritual or emotional distress in patients (Hanson *et al*., 2024). They should also be educated on the specific competencies of chaplains and how they can contribute to care plans. This includes encouraging healthcare professionals to refer patients to chaplains when appropriate and recognizing when spiritual or emotional support is needed. For chaplains, specialized CPE training is crucial. CPE programs teach chaplains to provide spiritual care in diverse and often challenging healthcare environments. These programs emphasize skills such as spiritual assessment, crisis intervention, emotional support, and collaborative communication with other healthcare providers. By ensuring that both healthcare professionals and chaplains are properly trained, healthcare teams can work more effectively together, leading to a more holistic approach to patient care.

A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities is crucial for effective collaboration within healthcare teams. Chaplains, like other members of the multidisciplinary team, need to have well-defined roles that complement the work of physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and other healthcare professionals. The role of the chaplain should be explicitly defined in relation to other team members to avoid duplication of services and ensure that each member of the team contributes effectively to patient care. In many cases, chaplains' responsibilities may include conducting spiritual assessments, offering counseling and prayer, facilitating end-of-life discussions, and supporting family members. They may also provide guidance and support to healthcare staff who are experiencing moral distress or burnout. It is important for chaplains to understand when to intervene in patient care and when to collaborate with other team members, maintaining a focus on their unique expertise in addressing spiritual needs (Hanson *et al*., 2024). Likewise, other team members should be aware of when it is appropriate to refer a patient or family to the chaplain. Clearly defined roles also help to ensure that spiritual care services are delivered in a timely and coordinated manner, avoiding gaps in care. This can be achieved through interdisciplinary care plans, regular team meetings, and ongoing communication among team members.

The integration of CPE into healthcare teams relies on the establishment of collaborative care models that allow chaplains to work alongside other healthcare professionals (Clevenger *et al*., 2021) [10]. Collaborative care models emphasize the importance of teamwork and coordination, ensuring that all aspects of a patient's carephysical, emotional, social, and spiritualare addressed. Effective collaborative models can be achieved through regular interdisciplinary rounds, where chaplains participate in patient care discussions and share their expertise on addressing spiritual needs. Chaplains can also contribute to care planning by offering input on how spiritual concerns may affect a patient's well-being or treatment decisions. In some settings, chaplains may work as part of specialized care teams, such as palliative care or oncology teams, where the focus is on end-of-life care and managing complex spiritual and emotional needs. Furthermore, fostering a culture of collaboration between chaplains and healthcare providers requires creating opportunities for joint learning and open dialogue. This could include educational workshops, case studies, and team-building activities that promote mutual respect and understanding of each other's roles and expertise. Collaborative care models also rely on creating a supportive environment where all team members, including chaplains, can share insights and offer suggestions on patient care.

The integration of CPE into healthcare teams must be evaluated to assess its impact on patient outcomes and the overall effectiveness of the care provided. Developing systems to measure the effectiveness of spiritual care services is essential to demonstrate the value of integrating chaplains into healthcare teams (Antoine *et al*., 2022) [4]. These measurements should include both qualitative and quantitative data, such as patient satisfaction surveys, spiritual assessments, and the incidence of referrals to chaplains. Patient outcomes, such as emotional well-being, coping abilities, and satisfaction with care, should be

regularly assessed to determine the impact of spiritual care on the patient's overall experience. Additionally, tracking healthcare provider satisfaction and the reduction of burnout can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of integrating CPE into healthcare teams. Feedback from both patients and healthcare providers can guide the continuous improvement of spiritual care services and help refine the integration process. Furthermore, healthcare institutions should collect data on the outcomes of patients who received spiritual care, including measures of quality of life, emotional resilience, and coping strategies (Chang *et al*., 2021) [9]. These results can be compared to patients who did not receive spiritual care to demonstrate the tangible benefits of incorporating CPE into healthcare teams.

2.5 Challenges and Solutions in Integrating CPE

Integrating Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into multidisciplinary healthcare teams offers profound benefits for patient care, particularly in addressing spiritual and emotional needs (Peñate *et al*., 2024) [34]. However, the process is fraught with challenges that can hinder the effective incorporation of CPE within healthcare settings. These challenges are often institutional, cultural, and professional in nature, requiring thoughtful solutions that include advocacy, education, and evidence-based outcomes. Understanding these barriers and their corresponding solutions is essential to successfully integrating CPE and ensuring holistic care for patients.

One of the major barriers to integrating CPE into healthcare teams is institutional resistance, particularly when spiritual care is not perceived as a core component of medical treatment. Healthcare institutions are often focused primarily on clinical outcomes, which can result in a lack of understanding of the importance of spiritual care. Furthermore, the culture of some healthcare environments may not be conducive to accepting spiritual and emotional support as essential elements of patient care. In highly secular or scientifically oriented settings, there may be a tendency to view spiritual care as secondary or even unnecessary. To overcome these institutional and cultural barriers, it is crucial to build organizational commitment through clear policy development. Healthcare institutions must explicitly recognize the value of spiritual care in their mission and goals, aligning it with patient-centered care principles (Berry *et al*., 2022) [7]. Additionally, healthcare leaders must be educated about the impact of spiritual care on patient well-being, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach that includes physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. This shift in institutional culture can be supported through continuous dialogue, educational initiatives, and leadership advocacy.

Healthcare professionals, particularly those without a strong background in spirituality, may be skeptical of the role of chaplains and CPE in patient care (Layson *et al*., 2023) [24]. Some may view spiritual care as outside the scope of medical practice or fear that it could interfere with medical decision-making. Nurses, physicians, and other team members may also feel uncomfortable addressing patients' spiritual needs if they lack the skills or training to do so. To address this resistance, interdisciplinary education is key. Healthcare professionals should be trained to recognize the spiritual needs of patients and to understand how chaplains can assist in addressing these needs. Interdisciplinary workshops, seminars, and case discussions that highlight the role of CPE in enhancing patient care and supporting staff well-being can help foster collaboration. Additionally, healthcare workers should be given concrete examples of how spiritual care integrates with medical care, reinforcing that chaplains are essential members of the healthcare team who complement, rather than conflict with, other forms of treatment.

Another significant challenge to the integration of CPE is funding and resource allocation. Spiritual care programs often face financial constraints, which can limit the availability of CPE-trained chaplains and resources to support their work. In many healthcare settings, chaplains are seen as non-essential personnel, and their inclusion in patient care teams is often regarded as an afterthought (Nash *et al*., 2022) [28]. Without adequate funding, healthcare institutions may struggle to provide the necessary infrastructure for CPE programs, including training, staffing, and ongoing professional development. To address this challenge, healthcare institutions should be encouraged to consider the long-term benefits of spiritual care, not just in terms of patient outcomes, but also in terms of overall healthcare system efficiency. Research has shown that spiritual care can improve patient satisfaction, enhance communication between patients and healthcare providers, and reduce stress and burnout among healthcare professionals. By framing the integration of CPE as an investment in both patient care and staff well-being, advocates can make a compelling case for securing funding. Partnerships with faith-based organizations, government agencies, and charitable foundations can also provide financial support for spiritual care initiatives.

One of the most effective strategies for overcoming the barriers to integrating CPE is advocacy. Advocates for spiritual care, including chaplains, healthcare leaders, and patient advocacy groups, should work to raise awareness about the importance of addressing patients' spiritual and emotional needs (Antoine *et al*., 2021) [5]. These advocates can present evidence supporting the benefits of CPE integration, including improved patient outcomes, enhanced patient satisfaction, and better team collaboration. Educational initiatives are also essential. Training programs should be implemented to increase healthcare professionals' understanding of the role of chaplains and the importance of spiritual care. Regular in-service training and workshops can help to overcome misconceptions and build a culture of acceptance and support for spiritual care services. Creating a shared understanding of spiritual care among healthcare providers can help reduce resistance and promote collaboration.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of CPE integration, healthcare institutions should employ evidence-based outcomes. Collecting data on patient satisfaction, emotional well-being, and spiritual care interventions can provide quantifiable proof of the value of spiritual care (Tan *et al*., 2022) [41]. Additionally, outcomes related to healthcare providers, such as reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction, can serve as further justification for investing in CPE programs. Research should focus on demonstrating the tangible benefits of spiritual care, such as improvements in the quality of life for patients, enhanced coping mechanisms during illness, and reduced hospital readmission rates. Using outcome measures that directly relate to the patient's experience and healthcare provider satisfaction can help secure the resources needed for CPE integration. Moreover,

collaborating with academic institutions to conduct rigorous research can strengthen the evidence base for CPE, providing the data necessary to convince stakeholders of its importance.

Integrating Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into healthcare teams presents numerous challenges, including institutional and cultural barriers, resistance from healthcare professionals, and funding limitations. However, by employing strategies such as advocacy, interdisciplinary education, and evidence-based outcomes, these challenges can be effectively addressed. By raising awareness of the value of spiritual care and demonstrating its positive impact on patient outcomes and healthcare provider well-being, CPE can be successfully integrated into healthcare teams. Ultimately, the inclusion of CPE in healthcare settings contributes to a more holistic, patient-centered approach to care, enhancing both the patient and healthcare provider experience.

2.6 Case Studies and Best Practices

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) has become an essential component of holistic healthcare, addressing the spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs of patients, families, and healthcare providers. Numerous healthcare institutions have successfully integrated CPE into their multidisciplinary teams, resulting in improved patient outcomes, enhanced collaboration, and a greater sense of well-being for both patients and healthcare workers (So *et al*., 2022) [39]. Examining successful models and the lessons learned from these institutions provides valuable insights into best practices for CPE integration.

One prominent example of successful CPE integration can be found in the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The Mayo Clinic has long recognized the importance of holistic care, integrating CPE as a core element of their patient-centered care model. The hospital's pastoral care team works closely with medical professionals to provide spiritual support during the patient's illness journey. They have adopted a collaborative approach where chaplains are involved in rounds with other healthcare providers, contributing to the development of a comprehensive care plan. By embedding chaplains in daily healthcare activities, the Mayo Clinic ensures that spiritual care is provided alongside medical care, addressing both the physical and emotional needs of patients (Wirpsa *et al*., 2023) [49].

Another successful model is found in the Cleveland Clinic, which established a spiritual care program focused on enhancing communication between healthcare teams and patients' families. In this model, CPE-trained chaplains provide emotional and spiritual support to both patients and families while also assisting healthcare professionals in navigating challenging ethical dilemmas. Chaplains are integral members of the multidisciplinary team, engaging in regular meetings with physicians, nurses, and social workers to ensure that spiritual needs are addressed throughout the care process (Kwak *et al*., 2021) [23]. The Cleveland Clinic emphasizes the importance of interprofessional communication, where chaplains contribute their unique perspectives on the patient's spiritual well-being, fostering a collaborative approach to care. These institutions have achieved success in integrating CPE by focusing on several key factors, including embedding spiritual care into routine clinical practice, ensuring active collaboration between spiritual care providers and medical staff, and training healthcare professionals to recognize and address spiritual needs.

Integrating Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into healthcare teams has proven to be a successful and valuable approach for providing holistic patient care. Successful models, such as those seen at the Mayo Clinic and Cleveland Clinic, demonstrate that active collaboration, education, and the use of evidence-based outcomes are key to integrating CPE effectively. The lessons learned from these institutions collaboration, education, demonstrating value, overcoming institutional barriers, and cultural competency serve as valuable best practices for other healthcare settings looking to integrate CPE into their patient care models. By implementing these strategies, healthcare institutions can ensure that patients receive comprehensive, compassionate care that addresses both their physical and spiritual needs (Vogus *et al*., 2021) [48].

2.7 Future Directions

As healthcare continues to evolve, the integration of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into multidisciplinary healthcare teams plays a crucial role in providing holistic care to patients (Ragsdale and Desjardins, 2022) [35]. This review outlines future directions and policy recommendations for expanding the integration of CPE in healthcare settings, focusing on expanding CPE training and accreditation, enhancing research on spiritual care, and encouraging policy reforms to support its role in multidisciplinary teams.

One of the key challenges in integrating CPE into healthcare teams is the need for standardized and widespread training and accreditation (Fleenor *et al*., 2022) [12]. To ensure that chaplains and spiritual care providers are equipped with the necessary skills, healthcare institutions must prioritize the expansion of CPE training programs. This can be achieved through collaboration between hospitals, universities, and accrediting bodies to create more accessible and comprehensive training pathways for spiritual care providers. Expanding training programs would help to address the growing demand for spiritual care professionals as healthcare institutions recognize the importance of addressing the emotional and spiritual well-being of patients (Nieuwsma *et al*., 2021) [29]. Furthermore, accreditation standards for CPE programs need to be consistently updated to reflect the evolving role of spiritual care in multidisciplinary teams. By ensuring that chaplains receive appropriate training in crisis intervention, patient-centered communication, and ethical decision-making, healthcare institutions can maintain high standards of care. Expanding the availability of accredited programs, including online and remote learning options, could increase the accessibility of CPE to a broader pool of potential chaplains and spiritual care providers, making it possible for more healthcare organizations to integrate CPE effectively into their teams.

Another important area for future development is the need for more robust research on the impact of spiritual care on patient outcomes and the broader healthcare environment (Ross *et al*., 2022) [37]. Although some studies have highlighted the benefits of integrating spiritual care, there is still a lack of comprehensive, evidence-based research demonstrating the tangible effects of CPE on patient satisfaction, mental health, and overall well-being. Future research should focus on establishing clear metrics for assessing the effectiveness of spiritual care interventions, such as reductions in patient anxiety, improvements in

emotional resilience, and enhanced coping mechanisms during illness. In addition, research should explore the cost-effectiveness of CPE integration. Healthcare institutions face significant financial pressures, and understanding how integrating spiritual care into the care model impacts overall healthcare costs (such as reducing readmissions or improving staff retention) could be persuasive for institutions considering implementing or expanding CPE programs. Collaborative research efforts between academic institutions, healthcare organizations, and spiritual care providers could help generate valuable data to inform the future integration of CPE in healthcare systems. Moreover, as healthcare systems become more diverse, research should also examine the role of culturally competent spiritual care. By focusing on how different cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds influence spiritual care needs, healthcare providers can create more personalized and effective spiritual care interventions that respect the unique needs of each patient (Li *et al*., 2021) [25].

In order to institutionalize the role of CPE in healthcare settings, policy reforms are necessary at both the organizational and governmental levels. Healthcare policies should be designed to encourage the integration of spiritual care into care delivery models. Healthcare institutions need to establish policies that define the role of chaplains and ensure they are included as part of the core healthcare team. This includes creating formalized pathways for chaplains to participate in patient rounds, treatment planning, and family meetings, ensuring that spiritual care is considered alongside medical and psychological care. Government policies and funding initiatives should also support the integration of CPE by providing financial resources for healthcare institutions to train and employ spiritual care providers (Rambo and Giles, 2022) [36]. Policies could include grants or reimbursements for hospitals that invest in spiritual care training, as well as incentives for the development of multidisciplinary teams that include chaplains and other spiritual care professionals. By integrating spiritual care into insurance models and reimbursement structures, healthcare systems can provide more comprehensive care while ensuring that spiritual support is accessible to all patients, regardless of their financial means (Ijaz and Carrie, 2023) [22].

Additionally, healthcare regulatory bodies should advocate for the inclusion of spiritual care training as a component of ongoing professional development for healthcare providers. This would help bridge the gap between healthcare professionals' medical expertise and the recognition of patients' emotional and spiritual needs. By fostering an environment where healthcare workers are trained to understand the value of spiritual care, the integration of CPE into healthcare teams becomes more feasible. The future of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in healthcare lies in expanding training and accreditation, enhancing research on spiritual care, and implementing policy reforms that support its integration into multidisciplinary teams. By expanding access to training, developing robust research demonstrating the effectiveness of spiritual care, and promoting supportive policies, healthcare systems can ensure that spiritual well-being is addressed alongside physical health. The integration of CPE is essential in providing holistic, patient-centered care that improves patient outcomes and enhances the overall healthcare experience (Smiechowski *et al*., 2021) [38]. As the demand for spiritual care continues to grow, these future directions and policy recommendations will help healthcare institutions provide comprehensive care that meets the diverse needs of patients and healthcare providers alike.

3. Conclusion

The integration of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) into multidisciplinary healthcare teams offers a transformative approach to patient care, addressing not only the physical and psychological aspects but also the spiritual and emotional dimensions. This review has explored the significance of CPE in healthcare, highlighted the core competencies required for chaplains, and examined the challenges and solutions in integrating spiritual care within healthcare systems.

A key point in this discussion is the growing recognition of the importance of holistic patient care. Modern healthcare is increasingly focused on treating the whole person, which includes understanding and addressing the spiritual and emotional needs of patients. CPE provides chaplains with the specialized training required to offer spiritual support, crisis counseling, and ethical decision-making guidance. Furthermore, chaplains collaborate with other healthcare professionals, enhancing communication and teamwork within multidisciplinary teams, which leads to improved patient outcomes and overall well-being.

The need for a holistic approach to patient care cannot be overstated. In an era where medical advancements continue to evolve, it is crucial that healthcare systems also adapt to include spiritual care as an integral part of the treatment process. Research has shown that addressing spiritual and emotional health alongside physical health can enhance patient satisfaction, reduce stress, and improve resilience during critical care situations. As healthcare continues to embrace patient-centered care, the role of CPE in supporting spiritual well-being will only become more central.

Looking toward the future, it is clear that CPE will play a critical role in shaping the future of healthcare. Expanding training programs, supporting research on spiritual care, and advocating for policy reforms to integrate CPE into healthcare teams will help healthcare systems provide more comprehensive care. As the demand for holistic approaches to care increases, the integration of CPE offers a pathway to meeting the diverse needs of patients and ensuring that healthcare remains compassionate, effective, and patient-centered.

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