

Hospital Execs In Soul Search For Leadership



Executives in the healthcare sector know they need to work hard to create an environment that fosters the healing process and many are now resorting to spiritual health to improve their own personal capabilities, writes Shannon Barnet of [Becker's Hospital Review](#).

Three healthcare leaders — Sister Carol Keehan, president and CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based [Catholic Health Association](#); Ed Fry, president of executive search firm [FaithSearch Partners](#); and Anthony R. Tersigni, EdD, president and CEO of St. Louis-based [Ascension](#) — agree that spiritual health oftentimes goes beyond religion alone.

For many executives, nurturing their sense of spirituality might include creating time each day for reflection, meditation, community service or various other activities. Although it might be easy to write off such tasks as low on the priority list, spiritual health is actually an important business strategy administrators and executives can use to become well-rounded individuals and better leaders.

“We describe the compassionate and personalised care that we provide at Ascension as ‘holistic,’ meaning that we treat the whole person — body, mind and spirit,” said Dr. Tersigni. “We encourage our caregivers to think about their own health and well-being in a similarly holistic fashion and attend to the needs of their own body, mind and spirit.”

Ed Fry, as well as the FaithSearch Partners' philosophy, support this ideology of holistic care.

“I’ve always been a proponent of the idea that a well-rounded person is healthy,” said Fry. “To be rounded out and healthy, there is a spiritual component that requires nurturing in a proactive, intentional way.”

Healthcare leaders looking to nurture their spiritual health should start by reflecting upon their values, philosophies and priorities in life — be it prioritising the dignity of others above all, focusing attention on one’s own family or emphasising care for the less fortunate — according to Sister Keehan.

The next step is incorporating everyday changes that support those values, according to Fry. He suggests healthcare leaders incorporate spiritual discipline into their daily routine.

This could include daily prayer, devotional time, meditation, scriptural study or other activities, explained Fry.

As the leader of Ascension, Dr. Tersigni sets an example for his fellow executives and the organisation’s caregivers by eating healthily and being physically active, as well as taking time for prayer, reflection and community service. These activities help him to feel recharged.

Some hospitals and health systems —whether religiously affiliated or secular — offer executives the opportunity for sabbaticals every few years.

“Sabbaticals allow executives to take time off to do something totally different, which allows them to return to work with more clarity,” added Fry. “This perk can also help ward off burnout, so leaders are operating in a much more effective way than if they are feeling spiritually drained.”

In addition to helping leaders guide a hospital or health system, spirituality serves as a way to cope with stress or burnout. Executives in any industry would argue that they experience a unique level of and type of stress, including in healthcare, explained Fry.

“The difference in healthcare is executives are dealing with decisions that may affect life or death or, at the very least, people’s quality of life. Sure, this stress may be felt a bit more acutely on the physician or clinician side, but hospital and health system leaders create the environments in which providers can do their job,” he noted.

Sister Keehan shared examples of how the stress of healthcare can weigh on industry leaders.

“Leaders are frequently asked to tighten a hospital’s financial belt and cut jobs without jeopardising safety. They oversee the organisation’s instrument sterilisation rules to prevent infections and they are held responsible if a worker who was hired turns out to be addicted to drugs or is selling drugs to patients in the facility,” she said. “These are the types of things that can keep a CEO up at night.”

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