

# European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

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## Editorial

### Dear colleagues, dear friends

In March, René Hefti visited the 9th World Research Congress of the European Association for Palliative Care EAPC in Madrid and was impressed by the remarkable interest in spiritual care.

In the feature article of this newsletter, Prof Carlo Leget introduces the EAPC Taskforce on Spiritual Care, which was established in 2011. Prof Leget will also speak at next year's European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health. The first announcement for the conference was sent out. Please find the link in the announcements section.

Another highlight of the conference will be a debate between Michael King and Harold Koenig on the influence of religion and spirituality on health. A short review of an article co-authored by Koenig in response to a keynote by King on the topic will give you an idea of what to expect.

If you are conducting research in the field of care and spirituality, you might consider submitting it for the Jean-Marc Fischer Prize, described later in this newsletter.

*Thomas Wartenweiler  
René Hefti*

## Feature Article

### Introducing the EAPC Taskforce on Spiritual Care

Palliative care is one of those areas where, according to the WHO-definition, attention to the spiritual dimension of pain and suffering is part of the care approach. Nevertheless the development of spiritual care in palliative care has been a difficult area for many years. Visiting the European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) conferences since 2005, at the conference in 2009 I began to develop ideas to bring things together, together with an old friend of mine, reverend Joep van de Geer. Hav-

ing visited a number of posters and presentations of different quality, we felt that the EAPC might benefit from a spiritual care taskforce that might coordinate initiatives and foster good quality research. With a small grant of the Dutch ministry of health we were able to invite a number of experts from different countries in order to lay the foundation of a new taskforce.

The first meeting of the taskforce to be was in Werkhoven, a small village in the Netherlands where we gathered for one weekend in 2010. We asked all participants to prepare some questions about the state of affairs in their country. We soon discovered that in many European countries similar developments and challenges could be identified. Traditional religious structures were falling apart, and new forms of spiritual care were being developed. We also managed to agree upon a definition of spirituality (1), inspired by the 2009 definition that was initiated by Christina Puchalski in the United States (2).



In 2011 the taskforce spiritual care was officially established (<http://www.eapcnet.eu/Themes/ClinicalCare/SpiritualCarein-PalliativeCare.aspx>). We identified three main areas of development: research, education and implementation. The research group took off with a world wide survey on research priorities in spiritual care. Some 971 palliative care professionals answered the questionnaire and there was consensus about the top 3 research priorities in this

area: evaluate screening tools used to identify patients with spiritual needs; develop and evaluate conversation models for spiritual conversations with patients; and evaluate the effectiveness of spiritual care (3). After the publication of the results the group continued their work by setting up a worldwide 14 centre study on the spiritual care needs of patients and families, the results of which are about to be published.

The education group developed an inventory of education initiatives on the EAPC website, building a community of people who are searching for good ideas to develop implementation in their own country. They also made a survey reporting on the needs formulated by palliative care professionals as regards to education (4). The group also started the preparations of a EAPC white paper on education, which is still under construction.

The implementation group started with a series of short contributions from member countries of the EAPC about the state of affairs on spiritual care, to be published in the European Journal of Palliative Care. Until now contributions have been published about a number of countries including The Netherlands, Italy, the UK and Estonia. At this moment the group works on the results of a survey among professionals in various countries towards a publication.

At this moment the three groups are working more and more closely together, preparing an extensive literature review on spiritual care in palliative care.

Usually EAPC Taskforces have a life span of two years. Because of the many successes of our group, we are developing into a reference group: a new structure within the EAPC which enables us to build more stable long term networks. We have begun building a cooperation with the Global Network for Spirituality and Health (<https://smhs.gwu.edu/gwish/global-network>) at the Copenhagen Conference in 2015, and at our recent conference in Madrid we have begun organising a network of national linking persons in order to better benefit from national developments. We would love to extend our cooperation with other individuals and organisations or networks and are

happy to cooperate. Those who are interested can send an email to [c.leget@uvh.nl](mailto:c.leget@uvh.nl).

*Carlo Leget*

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- (1) Nolan, S., Saltmarsh, P., & Leget, C. J. W. (2011). Spiritual care in palliative care: working towards an EAPC Task Force. *European Journal of Palliative Care*, 86-89.
- (2) Puchalski, C., Ferrell, B., Virani, R., Otis-Green, S., Baird, P., Bull, J., ... & Pugliese, K. (2009). Improving the quality of spiritual care as a dimension of palliative care: the report of the Consensus Conference. *Journal of palliative medicine*, 12(10), 885-904.
- (3) Selman, L., Young, T., Vermandere, M., Stirling, I., & Leget, C. (2014). Research priorities in spiritual care: An international survey of palliative care researchers and clinicians. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 48(4), 518-531.
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#### Bio sketch

Prof Carlo Leget is full professor in Care Ethics at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

## The Challenge of Research into Religion and Spirituality

### Insights Into an Ongoing Debate

We are happy to announce that we have both Michael King's and Harold Koenig's confirmation of their participation in a debate on the influence of religion and spirituality on health at the ECRSH18 conference in Coventry.

This debate is part of an ongoing debate on the topic in academia. It is exemplified in two publications. The first is King's publication "The Challenge of Research into Religion and Spirituality" (1). Here, King argues that the positive association between religion/spirituality and health is often inflated and that the health gain is extremely limited or may even be non-existent.

The second is a response to King's publication co-authored by Koenig (2). While acknowledging some of King's criticism, they conclude that "in some respects, spirituality

will always be deeply subjective, but there are ways to objectify and study the contribution that it makes to patients' wellbeing and health and this is what should drive more research and its translation into practice...While critical debate is healthy, clinicians and scholars need to avoid undermining the potential importance of spirituality and religion in healthcare because of the perceived absence of rigorous evidence." They also highlight the importance of spiritual care even when it is difficult to "prove" scientifically that one needs to attend to spiritual needs.

*Thomas Wartenweiler*

#### References

- (1) King, M. (2014). The Challenge of Research into Religion and Spirituality (Keynote 1). *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, 4(2), 106-120.
- (2) Timmins, F., Caldeira, S., Naughton, M. T., Plakas, S., & Koenig, H. G. (2016). A Commentary on Michael King. "The Challenge of Research into Religion and Spirituality." *Journal for the Study of Spirituality* 4 (2014): 106-20. *Religions*, 7(4), 39.

## J.-M. Fischer Prize

### Edition 2017-2018

Through the Jean-Marc Fischer Prize, the Doctor Jean-Marc Fischer Foundation encourages reflection in the field of human, social and theological sciences. Three prizes will be awarded in this third contest, which welcomes submissions in French and English from around the world.

Theme: *Care and Spirituality*

Three prizes will be awarded :

- 1) A Scientific Prize - CHF 4000.-, to reward a scientific work (clinical study, review of scientific literature) on the theme of the contest.
- 2) A Special Jury Prize - CHF 3000.-, to reward a more personal work (dissertation, case study, reflection paper...) on the same theme.
- 3) A « Culture, Care and Spirituality » Prize - CHF 3000.-, to reward a scientific work or a reflection paper on the theme of the contest associated with a cultural dimension (eg. a study on a specific culture, a cross-

cultural comparison, or a culture-specific treatment).

The deadline for submission of applications is 31 October 2017. Please find more information about submissions requirements [here](#).

## Announcements

### Meetings & Conferences

#### IGGS Annual Meeting together with 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Spiritual Care

On the topic of chronic pain & spirituality. October 27-28, 2017; Zurich/Switzerland; further information to follow.

#### 6<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health and 5th International Conference of the British Association for the Study of Spirituality

On the topic of forgiveness and reconciliation in health, medicine and social sciences May 17-19, 2018; Coventry/England; for further information see [www.ecrsh.eu](http://www.ecrsh.eu) or download the [first announcement](#).

#### Pre-Conference Research Workshop with Prof. Harold G. Koenig and other experts

May 13-16, 2018; Coventry, UK; for further information see [www.ecrsh.eu/ecrsh-past-conferences](http://www.ecrsh.eu/ecrsh-past-conferences) or contact [rene.hefti@rish.ch](mailto:rene.hefti@rish.ch).

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