

Chaplain – Robert Baral

Pt – XY, 80+ year old male, married, large family, friends in support

Religion - Methodist

Theme – “Supporting a Family Amidst a Critical Surgery:

We’ve Lived a Good Life.”

Location – Surgical Intensive Care Unit waiting room.

Length of Visit – 30 minutes; time – 14:30

Days in Hospital – 6

## **I. DATA & OBSERVATIONS**

Referral from Nursing, who report the patient is an 80+ y/o male, admitted for rectal bleed and now in emergency surgery. I found 6 family members in the surgery waiting area. The patient’s elderly wife is resting with a wheelchair by their side. Others present are 2 older women who are wife’s friends. There is a middle aged couple, the son and daughter-in-law. The son looks angry and the daughter-in-law looks fearful. Their teenager, the patients’ grandson, is also present.

Wife reports Mr. Y had prostate cancer 13 years ago with surgery and radiation therapy. The cancer has since recurred. Wife reports she herself has also had a stroke, breathing trouble in last 2 years and is easily fatigued. She is pushed in wheelchair today by family. Couple have been married 50+ years. I escort them to the Surgical ICU waiting area as requested by staff. They give me permission to visit with them.

## **IV. THE INTERVIEW**

C=Chaplain; W=Wife; S=Son; D=Daughter-in-Law;

T=Teenage grandson; FA=Friend A; FB=Friend B

W1 – [Family sees that I am hesitant in leading us to our destination. The elevator doors open] We know our way around here very well.

C1 – You’ve spent time here before Ma’am?

W2 – More than I wish! I was a patient here for a stroke and heart failure 2 years ago.

C2 – I can see you all know this place better than I do.

W3 – We’ve spent a lot of time in this hospital. [I look into Mrs. Y’s eyes. She smiles at me. I lead the parade of family & friends out of the elevator into the surgical ICU waiting room. I am conscious that I am leading a parade of scared and worried people. I smile back and wife seems more relaxed. ]

FA1 – Have you been here long, Chaplain?

C3 – [I turn as we walk and make eye contact.] One week.

FA2 – Where did they transfer you from, Chaplain Bob?

C4 - [I think they assume I am a Minister with a Church, though I've clearly introduced myself as a hospital Chaplain.] I am a Chaplain intern here with this hospital.

C5 – [We arrive at our destination. I pull up chairs so that family and friends are sitting in an arc. I pull up chair from behind desk to face them all. After they are seated, I sit down.] I think we will have more privacy to talk here. May I ask your first names and your relationship again to Mr. Y?

W4 – I'm his wife.

C6 - [They each tell me their first names, which I promptly forget. I am conscious that I am anxious. I see fear, concern and anger in their eyes.] Have you been here at the hospital long today?

FA3 – We've been here since 11:00 am. He went to surgery at 1 o'clock and it's now 3:30 and nobody has told us anything since then.

C7 – [Son has frown frozen on his face. I tread carefully.] You've been here since 11:00 and he went to surgery at one o'clock. You haven't had any news since then. I see.

W5 – Could you find out what's going on and how he is?

C8 – [It is clear to me this is the most important thing I can do for them right now. And if I don't do this now, they probably will not trust me, open up to me, or even accept my offer to be with them.] Let me go and find out where he is and find his Nurse. I will come right back and report to you.

W6 – Thank you!

C9 - [I go to Surgical ICU and find the patient's room. He is still in surgery. I find the Nurse who will be taking care Mr. Y there. She knows nothing yet and looks stressed out. I advise her that I have brought family to surgical ICU waiting room, the situation and their current anxious state. I ask if the Nurse could find out how Mr. Y is doing and come out to see family for a moment. She agrees and makes a phone call. I thank her and let her what she does for people is appreciated.]

C10 – [I return with the Nurse to the family, who gave them an update. The family expresses thanks to the Nurse, who then leaves us.] I would like to offer to stay with you all for a while, if you want.

C11 – [Wife nods consent. I sit down again. I address Mrs. Y, then make eye contact with each loved one briefly, then back to the wife.] What brought your husband into the hospital this time?

W7 – He was bleeding from his intestines since Friday.

C12 – He's been bleeding from his intestines for 3 days. I see.

W8 – He's really very sick this time.

C13 – Is your husband normally a healthy man?

W9 – He had prostate cancer about 9 years ago. We were always worried if they got it all, or if it was in the lymph nodes and they missed some.

W10 – [Wife shares freely about her husband's health since his cancer.]

C14 – [I lean forward slightly and keep eye contact with wife. I nod my head several times.] I see.

W11 – We've both lived a good long life. We are both ready to go. We're not interested in longevity.

C15 – When you say you are both ready to go, how do you mean that?

W12 – We are ready to go home to Heaven. We've lived a good life together. [Wife expresses deep love for her family.]

C16 – You've both lived a good life together. How did you meet? [Mrs. Y shares romantic story of their first date. A pause of silence follows.]

C17 – [I break the silence] Are you folks from the local area? Do you have other family nearby?

W13 – My husband's 2 brothers died in 2007. [She elaborates.]

C18 – [I offer condolences to family for their losses and summarize back what the wife has shared.] So through these illnesses and difficulties, do you have a sense of how GOD is with you all in these things?

W14 – We have a strong Faith. Our Pastor was here yesterday and the day before.

C19 – [I sense this is a good time to wind down the visit to give the family time with each other.] Would you like me to pray with you all about these things you've shared with me? We can lift them up to The LORD together.

W15 – [Wife and family agree.]

C20 – Do you have a particular Scripture passage you would like me to read for you? [They do not, so I suggest PSALM 23. I change all the "I's" into "we's." I read slowly and clearly from a Bible. As I finish, I look up and see that they all have their eyes closed. The wife and her 2 friends are visibly tearful.]

C21 – Let us pray together to our Lord JESUS CHRIST. May I offer you my hands? I kneel down in front of wife and offer my hands to the teenager on my right and one of the wife's friends on my left. They take my hands. They all then take one another's hands.]

C22 – [I ask for peace, comfort and strength for the patient, the wife, all their family and friends. I begin The Our Father and find the wife and others joining me quietly. I speak slowly and clearly. I end with a prayer for GOD's blessings. I stand.]

C23 – [They are all quietly tearful. I offer my hand to each one in turn, starting with the wife, making solid eye contact with each.] Thank you for letting me be with you.

S1 – [The son is no longer scowling. His face strikes me as gentle, strong, warm, reassuring. He speaks for the first time.] Thank you so much, Chaplain Bob.

C25 - [I hand the son a Pastoral Care Dept brochure and remind them that we are here if they need us at any time. I also hand him a hospital meal gift card and encourage them to take a break and get something to eat and drink. I raise my hand as I leave.] We will keep all of you in our prayers. I will check in on you later. Please have the Nurse page us if you need us at any time. May GOD bless.

## **V. PATIENT EVALUATION**

**POSSIBLE PHYSICAL CONCERNS - Wife/family** concerns: 1. What is condition of pt? 2. Why is he still in surgery, when will he come to surgical ICU and to what room? 3. Will pt die in surgery? 4. When can we see him? 5. Who can we speak to for information NOW? Can you make that happen?

**POSSIBLE PSYCHOSOCIAL CONCERNS - Wife:** 1. Will I be able to live if my husband dies? Would I want to? 2. How will we be able to cope with more suffering and grief in my family? 3. Will I and my husband become an intolerable burden on our adult children? 4. What more support will my family be able to give us beyond what they are doing now?

**POSSIBLE SOCIAL CONCERNS - Wife/family:** 1. Worry re how they will cope if patient dies or is severely ill long term; 2. Anger from, as they saw it, not being adequately informed of patient's condition in timely manner; 3. Questioning necessity of present and future further invasive care.

## **VI. SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT USING “PRUYSER” MATRIX<sup>1</sup>**

**\*\*Awareness of GOD** – Wife and family’s belief in Heaven, that GOD has given them a good life & close family; active members local Church, receiving support from their Pastor; accepting Scripture reading, praying with me, saying The Our Father with me, finding comfort in Faith.

**\*\*Providence** – GOD’s plan is that wife and her husband not be without each other on earth or in Heaven; that GOD has blessed them over the decades with each other, their children and grandchildren; support through family, The Church, friends.

**\*\*Communion** – wife/family find GOD through The Church, in fellowship with family and friends, in Scripture, in prayer.

**\*\*Repentance** – did not explore on this visit, except as part of The Our Father prayer. No apparent pressing issues.

**\*\*Vocation** – marriage, family and the blessings of GOD that come from living a life of Christian Faith

**\*\*Faith** – family puts their trust in GOD’s care, The Church, GOD’s Word, prayer and each other.

**\*\*Gratitude** – for each other, for Faith, for children and grandchildren, the blessings GOD has given them.

## **VII. CHAPLAIN EVALUATION OF CASE**

This is a Protestant Christian family consisting of a husband and wife, married for many decades, with several adult children and grandchildren. Family appears to be close and supportive of one another. Active in their Church with a supportive relationship with their Pastor. They are comfortable praying together.

The husband and wife have both been seriously ill chronically for at least 1 decade. They are aware that GOD has given them many blessings through the years. They look forward to both going to Heaven together. The wife fears how she will cope if she becomes a widow. She shares that they feel they have lived an adequately long and happy life together under GOD’s care.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul W. Pruyser, “The Minister as Diagnostician: Personal Problems in Pastoral Perspective.” 1st Edition. Harper & Row Publishers, 1968. Pruyser offers a ground breaking method of spiritual assessment: Awareness of GOD; Providence; Communion; Repentance; Vocation; Faith; Gratitude.

The family initially feels that they have been forgotten by the hospital system while waiting for their loved one in surgery. This is a very understandable expression of their reasonable underlying worry and fear for their loved one in surgery; for the patient and his wife's long history of serious illness; their desire that patient's life not be prolonged needlessly if things do not go well; desire that neither patient nor wife suffer further in their illnesses needlessly; facing real possibility that patient might die during this hospitalization.

The family was reassured when I addressed their immediate need for information on the status of their loved one and facilitated the Nurse coming to speak to them. This allowed them to open up with me in trust, sharing about themselves and stating their feelings and worries. They found comfort in my presence as a reminder that GOD was there with them. They found strength and encouragement in Scripture reading and prayer, tapping easily into their Faith.

### **VIII. THEOLOGICAL & PASTORAL CONCERNS**

How will the wife and family do if the patient dies this hospitalization? The husband and wife have both suffered a lot the last decade with ongoing illness. How will their understanding of GOD give them comfort? How would I do if in this condition? GOD puts all our tears into His Book.

#### **PSALM 56:8-9**

“Thou tellest my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not in Thy Book? When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for GOD is for me.”<sup>2</sup>

Will I find all my tears – of both lament and joy - recorded in GOD's Book of Life when I arrive in Heaven?

When the time comes for the husband and wife to die from this world, they both have the certain Faith that they will enter Heaven and live with GOD forever. Will I have the same certainty when my time comes?

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<sup>2</sup> KJV, PSALM 56:8-9.

### **JOHN 3:16**

“For GOD so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>3</sup>

Will my Faith be strong enough in The Lord the next time I face the death of another loved one and my own death?

And until that day comes, whatever the suffering that might lay ahead for this husband and wife and their family, I pray that they will always be conscious that GOD's Presence is always there with them. GOD knows our suffering, for He Himself suffered on The Cross for us.

### **I PETER 3:18**

“For CHRIST also hath once suffered for sins, The Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to GOD, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by The Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

Will I be comforted by this knowledge as I face whatever suffering lies ahead for me in my own life?

### **IX. PLANS FOR NEXT VISIT**

I followed up with a visit as promised several days after surgery, but later than I promised them, meeting with Mr. & Mrs. Y and their daughter. I referred case to another Chaplain for further support.

### **X. LEARNING GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

1. Is GOD calling me to a hospital Chaplaincy? I was very thankful and felt fulfilled at being able to offer some comfort and support to this family. I was able to do the work needed.

2. Empathetic listening, giving myself to others in GOD's Name, comforting the suffering – I felt I did this well enough, that if I was a family member and received such Chaplain care, I would find it a comfort.

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<sup>3</sup> KJV, JOHN 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> KJV, I PETER 3:18.

3. To set and keep limits around my hospital Chaplain work – I followed up once, keeping my word to them, though I would have done more visits to this family if time had allowed. I referred this case for follow up support to another Chaplain, assuring they had further pastoral care as needed.

4. Appropriate sharing of empathetic tears with the suffering, while keeping centered on my pastoral care for others – I did feel tearful inside when we ended our prayer together, but not externally. Looking up, I saw they were all tearful, which I think was a helpful release of built up fearfulness for them. I am no longer always fighting to suppress my tearfulness completely with the suffering. I am searching for a better sense of when it is okay to do so, and when it is not.