

Chaplain – Robert Baral

Location – Medical Intensive Care Unit

Patient – Mrs. XY, an 80+ year old divorced female

days in hospital – 5; length of visit – 40 minutes

Religion – Pentecostal

Theme: “When People Claim Certain Healing for Critically Ill Loved Ones: Tread Carefully on Their Faith, Hopes of Prayers.”

I. DATA

This is an 80+ y/o female who is battling leukemia for a year and has had a bone marrow transplant. Admitting diagnosis is “sepsis” [blood infection]. Faith is Pentecostal. This is my 4th visit on this case. I met pt in the Emergency Room for 15 minutes as she was waiting transport to be brought to her room. Mrs. XY stated then she was being admitted “for blood work” related to “cancer.” She had asked me to read PSALM 91 to her and shared that “she is completely healed by GOD and in full remission.” She had shared then that she is divorced, but has strong support from family, friends and Church.

I followed up twice through the week, meeting her son-in-law at bedside, who is also the family’s Pastor, a Pentecostal Minister. In that visit, the son-in-law had just finished praying and singing a hymn for Mrs. Y. He allowed me to join him in prayer again and taught me a simple hymn, which we sang together for his mother-in-law. At that time, the patient was only able to say a few words and seemed confused.

Today I am doing a follow up in oncology and find the pt has been moved to the medical ICU. The Nurse tells me Mrs. Y developed shortness of breath, required a positive pressure mask machine and that they family needs support. Going first to the medical ICU, I find the patient has since been intubated and placed on a ventilator. After reporting to the ICU staff, I met the patient’s two daughters in the waiting room.

II. PLANS FOR THE VISIT

I appreciated very deeply the Faith of this lady, her family and her Pastor son-in-law. I got the very clear message from Mrs. Y and her son-in-law on previous visits that they believe, as part of their Faith, that their prayers for healing guarantee that the patient will be fully healed from her cancer. The significance of this lady's increasing trouble breathing, now on a ventilator, does not escape me.

Today I am meeting two daughters of the patient. I am concerned that the family's Faith might set them up for a devastating fall and crushing disappointment if their beloved Mom now. I pray silently to GOD, "Lord JESUS, give me careful words in what I say and don't say to this family, what Scripture to share and not share, what to pray and not pray!"

III. OBSERVATIONS UPON ENTERING THE ROOM

First to the patient's bedside in ICU. Brief conversation with the Nurse. The patient is fully sedated and on a ventilator. I report to the Nurse that I will be with family in waiting room. She tells me that I can bring the family in and she will try to answer any questions. I tell her I will spend a few minutes with them first and try to prepare them a little. I enter the waiting room and find two well dressed middle aged ladies, who greet me with slight smiles.

IV. INTERVIEW

C = Chaplain; A = Daughter # 1; B = Daughter # 2; RN = Nurse

C1 – [I make immediate eye contact with both daughters. I have interrupted their conversation. They look up at me.] Pardon the intrusion ladies. Are you the family of Mrs. Y?

A1 – Yes. We are.

C2 – I am the hospital Chaplain tonight. [I extend my hand to each and shake their hands.] I was just speaking briefly to your mother's Nurse and she told me you ladies were here. May I offer to spend some time with you?

A2 – Maybe. [Daughter 1 looks at daughter 2 for okay. Daughter 2 nods okay and smiles.]

C3 – May I have a seat for a few minutes? [I point to a seat which will allow me to face both family members.]

A3 – What Faith are you?

C4 – I am Christian.

A4 - Do you believe in The Trinity, GOD The Father, The Son and The HOLY SPIRIT?

C5 – Yes. Absolutely.

A5 – Do you believe in The Holy Bible?

C6 – Yes. [I know this is a necessary gauntlet for the family before they will let me in. I know, from meeting the patient and her Pastor/son-in-law that I will pass the test. I submit willingly.]

A6 – Do you believe in the gifts of The HOLY SPIRIT?

C7 – Yes, Ma'am.

A8 – Well, then yes, you can join us. Sorry, but we have to ask. You never know these days!

C8 – Yes, I understand. Thank you for letting me join you ladies. [I sit down facing both family members.]

B1 – And what is your name again?

C9 – I am Bob. I am the hospital Chaplain on duty today. I met your mother in the Emergency Room on Sunday and your family member, Pastor C., a few days later when I visited your mother again.

A9 – That's my husband, Pastor DC. I am EC. And this is my sister F.

B2 – Okay, we know who you are. [Daughter E smiles and nods approvingly towards me.] You prayed with D for our Mom on your knees. GOD sent you to us!

C10 – Yes, your husband had just finished praying over and singing a hymn for your Mom. He allowed me the privilege of praying again with him for your Mom and singing a short hymn for her. And now I am thankful to be able to be here with you ladies. Have you been in to see your Mom yet today?

A10 – No, they were just moving her to another room. [I suspect they do not know how serious their loved one's condition is.]

C11 – The Nurse says that we can go back in just a few minutes to see your Mom. But first I wanted to meet you ladies.

A11 – So you met our Mom in the Emergency Room, you were saying?

C12 – Yes. X was sitting in the hallway in a wheelchair in the ER, waiting to be taken up to her room. I passed by her a few times in the hallway. And each time I passed by, she smiled at me, and I smiled back at her. So eventually I had a few minutes to stop and talk to her.

A12 – She always smiles at everyone!

C13 – And X’s smile was so encouraging to me! She told me a little bit about herself. About her cancer. That she was coming in because of blood tests. That GOD had given her healing and strength. That she was divorced. She asked me to read PSALM 91 to her and then allowed me to pray with her briefly.

A13 – PSALM 91 is my favorite Scripture passage. I taught that to her because I had cancer 7 years ago and GOD healed me completely. I am in complete remission. JESUS already has won the victory for us. We just have to claim it!

C14 – PSALM 91 is your favorite Bible Passage. You had cancer and JESUS healed you completely.

A14 – So we claim the same victory for our Mom in JESUS. [They recite These Scriptures from memory for me.] PSALM 91:7, “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.”¹ ISAIAH 53:5, “...And with His stripes we are healed!”² I JOHN 5:4-5, “For whatsoever is born of GOD overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our Faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that JESUS is The Son of GOD?”³

C15 – AMEN. [I see these ladies are very knowledgeable in The Scriptures, that they think Biblically, and that their Faith is presently centered around claiming healing for their mother, as the one daughter did for herself in CHRIST some years ago. I make a mental note to tread carefully so as not to contribute to any unrealistic expectations the family has for the patient’s recovery, but not to injure or trample upon their hope either. I commit to give the family as much freedom as they need to express their Faith and hope. I see that both are vitally important to them now.]

C16 – May I suggest that we pray before we go in, if you ladies want?

A15 – Yes, let us pray. [Both daughters stand up. I stand up with them.]

C17 – Would you like to lead us in prayer for your Mom?

A16 – Yes! [We hold hands and daughter # 1 speaks a heartfelt prayer for healing for their Mom, claiming the healing in CHRIST.

B3 – [Daughter # 2 repeats AMEN throughout the prayer softly. I follow her example and do the same.]

C18 – Before we go in, I need to tell you what you will see. X is on a ventilator to help her breathe. Have you ever seen your Mom like that?

¹ KJV, PSALM 91:7.

² KJV, ISAIAH 53:5b.

³ KJV, I JOHN 5:4-5.

A17 – No.

C19 – Your Mom X is getting continuous medication through her intravenous lines to keep her asleep, so that she will not be uncomfortable on the ventilator. She has a breathing tube through her mouth into her windpipe. So she will not be able to speak to you.

B4 – We understand. [Both daughters shake their heads slowly “Yes.” Continuous eye contact with me.]

C20 – But what I find with patients who are not seemingly awake, is that somehow by GOD’s Grace, they know that their loved ones are there with them, even when they are receiving medications to keep them asleep. So you ladies can hold your Mom’s hand. You can speak to her. You can give a kiss to her on your hand and then place it on her cheek. And by GOD’s Grace, she will know you are there, feel your presence and hear your words. [Family nods, “Yes.”]

C21 - And I would be happy to read a Scripture and pray with you ladies with your Mom if you want at her bedside.

A18 – Yes. Could you read PSALM 91?

C22 – You would like me to read PSALM 91 over your Mom. And you would like us to pray together over her. [Family teaches me a short hymn to sing for their Mom at the bedside as part of their prayers.]

C23 – [I escort the family to the patient’s bedside in ICU. The Nurse waves us in. I place one daughter on each side. Short silence. Family seems steady on their feet and safe. I place a chair behind each daughter. I lean closer to the patient’s ear.] Hello X. It’s Chaplain Bob again. I am here with your daughters E and F. I am going to have them hold your hands. We are going to read a Scripture, pray and sing a hymn for you.”

C24 – [I place each daughter’s hand in Mrs. Y’s hand on either side of bed. I read PSALM 91 as they requested. I hold hands with family as they hold hands with their mother. We sing the short hymn they taught me. I lead in prayer, asking for strength, peace and GOD’s hand upon the patient and family. I lead in The Our Father and the family joins me. I end with a petition for blessing. I then instruct the daughters to sit down. They do so, holding Mrs. Y’s hand on each side.]

PSALM 91:1-16

¹ He that dwelleth in the secret place of The Most High shall abide under the shadow of The Almighty.

² I will say of The LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my GOD; in Him will I trust.

³ Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

⁴ He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His Truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

⁵ Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

⁶ Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

⁷ A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

⁸ Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

⁹ Because thou hast made The LORD, Which is my refuge, even The Most High, thy habitation;

¹⁰ There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

¹¹ For He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

¹² They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

¹³ Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

¹⁴ Because He hath set His Love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My Name.

¹⁵ He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

¹⁶ With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him My salvation. ⁴

⁴ KJV, PSALM 91:1-16.

RN1 – [Nurse then comes in. The Nurse and I have pre-arranged the time for her to explain the pt's situation to the family at the bedside. A lung scope will be done at the bedside in just a few minutes. The Nurse does her bedside teaching and then advises we must leave the room.]

C25 – [I escort the family back to waiting room and sit with them for a few minutes more. I advise them how to have the Chaplain paged at any time they need us. I tell them that I will see their mother again tomorrow. They thank me. We shake hands and I leave.]

V. PATIENT EVALUATION

PHYSICAL CONCERNS: Daughters re the patient: 1. Is she suffering now? 2. How sick is she? 3. Is she going to die now or soon? 4. When can we see her?

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCERNS: Daughters re the patient: 1. Denial of severity of patient's illness. 2. Anxiety related to some awareness that they do not understand fully how sick the patient is. Unspoken suppressed fear that the patient might not survive. 3. Fear re what it means for their mother to be on a ventilator.

SOCIOLOGICAL CONCERNS: Daughters re the patient: 1. Comfort knowing they have strong support from family, friends and Church, all of which in their lives are deeply intertwined. 2. Questioning how their family will cope if the patient does not get better. 3. Questioning how much their support network will be able to continue to be with family through this.

VI. SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT USING PRUYSER MATRIX⁵

Awe – Daughters have strong awareness of GOD’s Presence, comfort and peace in their midst at present.

Providence – Daughters feel GOD’s intent is to heal their loved one completely in response to their prayers based on PSALM 91 and their similar prayers for one sister during her cancer several years ago. They see GOD’s care in presence of their Church’s support, the family Pastor/son-in-law of the patient, and in support from hospital Chaplains.

Communion – Daughters find GOD in their midst whenever they pray and read Scriptures. They find Christian fellowship within their Church, which is very much a family Church.

Repentance – No sense of a need for repentance in this situation. Their mission is to also share their Faith with others, to be witnesses of JESUS CHRIST to others especially in midst of trials, to evangelize others in everyday life by their active Faith.

Faith – Family focal point of trust, peace, strength and renewal is in The Lord first, and in this situation only second in the care their mother is receiving in the hospital.

Grace & Gratitude – Family is thankful for GOD’s Love, for salvation in CHRIST, for past deliverances for their mother and other family, for their Church, for their loved ones members.

VII. CHAPLAIN EVALUATION

This 80+ year old cancer patient, with a recent bone marrow transplant, developed respiratory distress and now is on a ventilator. She is divorced, with no mention of the patient’s ex-husband, but with an otherwise seemingly intact close supportive family. Family has a strong Protestant Christian Faith, with good Church support. but has likely unrealistic expectations for patient’s full recovery and are not prepared to cope with possibility that the patient might die now.

⁵ 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.

VIII. THEOLOGICAL & PASTORAL CONCERNS

1. These Christian people have so much Faith in The Lord. I am concerned for how they will cope when the patient dies, and in particular if she dies now, in spite of their prayers and claiming from Scripture for complete healing. 2. How will the daughters continue to relate to GOD if their mother continues to be gravely ill, and when she dies? 3. How will I comfort this family in the face of these two possibilities?

IX. PLANS FOR NEXT VISIT

1. Be very careful about not encouraging unrealistic false hope for patient's full recovery in conversation, Scripture readings, prayer. Be equally careful not to injure or diminish their feelings of hope either. Be aware that the outcome is in GOD's hands. 2. Encourage family to share the weight of their burdens for their mother.

3. Encourage family to mobilize other loved ones, friends and Church for wider base of support. 4. Be prepared to say, "I don't know," to listen a lot and to simply be with them further as they wish. 5. Ask other oncology Chaplain to visit family and see if he can offer further support and insight.

X. LEARNING GOALS

1. PARTLY MET: To continue to discern if GOD is calling me to a fulltime hospital Chaplain ministry or elsewhere. Do I have the physical, emotional and spiritual strength to do this kind of ministry work fulltime? Maybe. I was able to handle this case without experiencing any such immediate fatigue. I found great reward in comforting this family, and in receiving their comfort to me. I felt strong sense that GOD was using me as an instrument of His peace for this family.

2. MET: To continue to improve my empathetic listening ministry skills, the giving of myself in GOD's Name to the suffering, and how to better give comfort to those in pain – I was respectful and attentive to family. I reflected back and refocused back what they shared with me to let them know they were being heard. I did a lot of listening and affirming of their Faith & feelings, while not judging their expectations.

3. MET: To set and keep limits around my hospital Chaplain work, going home when my shifts end, and to keep time reserved for personal, family and Faith life – I resisted desire to visit with family daily, so as not to overwhelm them. I asked another Chaplain to consult in visit with family.

4. NOT MET: To explore and experience further appropriate sharing of empathetic tears with the suffering, while keeping centered on my pastoral care for others. No tears were shared. But I felt intimately connected with this family and their pain. I was not hesitant to show it but kept appropriate pastoral & professional boundaries. Family welcomed me into their midst to join them in Faith, Scripture reading, prayer and hope.

5. MET: To continue to experiment with and expand my use of chants and hymns in hospital Chaplain ministry. This family has, in their tradition, simple repeating hymns as part of their prayer. I asked for daughters to teach me the hymn they would like to sing over their mother. We then sang it as part of our prayer for their mother as we held hands.