



## Medical Practice, the Church and COVID-19

Lindsay B. Carey<sup>1,2</sup> · Harold G. Koenig<sup>3,4</sup> · Ezra Gabbay<sup>5</sup> · Terrence Hill<sup>6</sup> ·  
Jeffery Cohen<sup>7</sup> · David Drummond<sup>8</sup> · Carl Aiken<sup>9</sup> · Jacinda R. Carey<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This issue of *JORH* explores the importance of religion and spirituality in medical practice, as well as research relating to the Church and its clergy, and finally the lingering effects of COVID-19.

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✉ Lindsay B. Carey  
Lindsay.Carey@latrobe.edu.au

Harold G. Koenig  
Harold.Koenig@duke.edu

<sup>1</sup> Public Health Palliative Care Unit, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Ethics and Society, University of Notre Dame, Sydney, Australia

<sup>3</sup> Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Medicine, Duke University Health Systems, Durham, NC, USA

<sup>4</sup> Department of Medicine, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

<sup>5</sup> Division of General Internal Medicine, Department of Medicine, Hospital Medicine Section, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, NY, USA

<sup>6</sup> The University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, USA

<sup>7</sup> St Vincent's Private Hospital Sydney, Australia and School of Medicine, University of Notre Dame, Sydney, NSW, Australia

<sup>8</sup> McKellar Centre, Barwon Health, Victoria, Australia

<sup>9</sup> Emeritus Chaplain, Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide, Australia and Alumni, Drew University, Madison, USA

## Introduction

An issue of increasing relevance in many pluralistic societies is the appropriateness of physicians discussing religion/spirituality within their medical practice. This issue of *JORH* explores a number of benefits and concerns of physicians being inclusive of religion and spirituality as part of their role in ensuring holistic patient care. Another area of ongoing research covered in this issue of *JORH* is that of the Church. Despite the numerical decline of Christianity in some regions of the world (Goldin & Muggah, 2020), Christianity still remains a prominent religion and, as indicated within this issue, research relating to Christianity continues to dominate empirical studies which explore the interconnections between religion, spirituality and health. Finally, this issue considers religious/spiritual research concerning adapted praxis relating to COVID-19.

## Medical Practice

With regard to medical practice, various articles in this issue explore the importance of integrating religion and spirituality for the care of patients. Within the USA, one study (i) explores integrating religion and spirituality into psychiatric outpatient treatment. Within Australia (ii), the need for integration of religion and spirituality into the mental health care of culturally and linguistically diverse populations is reviewed, as is (iii) spirituality within the practice of Australian health professionals, and (iv) patient preferences for the introduction of spirituality into Australian health-care. Other papers in this section consider (v) the use of the Ignatian examen in medical practice as a model for clinicians and (vi) Dostoevsky's method of 'Active Love' in modern medicine utilizing the novel characters of the Brothers Karamazov as an example.

Other practical instances of integrating religion/spirituality into clinical practice in this issue include articles relating to (vii) Iranian patient safety and spiritual health in the operating room; (viii) Nordic patient perspectives on existential communication with physicians when suffering from a severe, chronic illness; (ix) spirituality in critical care—the perceptions of professionals, patients and families, in Spain and Latin America; (x) traditional Somali Diaspora medical practices in the USA; and (xi) German general practitioners' personal spirituality, attitudes, and competency addressing spiritual issues in clinical practice. Finally, to conclude this section, (xii) an article offers a warning to clinicians about physicians disclosing their religiosity/spirituality within online biographies.

## The Church

As a further extension of previous issues of *JORH* (which considered 'Christianity'; *JORH* 2021a ; *JORH* 2021b; and the 'Clergy' *JORH*, 2023), this issue also considers diverse topics relating to the church, its clergy, and faithful constituents.

This section commences with exploring research relating to the church as an institution, namely: (i) the perspectives of people with disabilities; (ii) facilitators and barriers when conducting adult health programs within the African American church; (iii) the role of the church in promoting environmental awareness toward better health-related quality of life; (iv) an examination of culturally relevant health messages in African American churches; (v) spirituality as a key component of the Salvation Army's bridge treatment program in Aotearoa, New Zealand; (vi) the moderating role of church affirmation in the relationship between weight-rejection sensitivity and body dissatisfaction in young adults in the USA; and (vii) dyadic peer support to improve diet and physical activity among African American church members.

Other research articles relate more specifically to the clergy, namely (viii) 'Fit with Faith': an exploratory study examining a behavior change intervention for African American clergy and their spouses; (ix) physical violence and scapegoating within the family: an exploration of biblical texts and contemporary psychology; (x) examining the effect of early religious antecedents of spiritual well-being on the mental health of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina; (xi) the Selah pilot study of spiritual, mindfulness, and stress inoculation on stress-related outcomes among United Methodist clergy in the USA; and (xii) a controversial topic challenging clergy—science, scripture, and sexuality. This section concludes with more philosophical considerations, namely: (xiii) resilience and its sources from a Thomistic perspective; (xiv) "rejoice therapy", an effort to deliberately create and shape 'joy' according to Saint Paul of Tarsus; and lastly, (xv) as a reminder of our mortality, chronic gastro-duodenal ulcerative disease and the death of Father Stephan Schätzl from Viechtwang (Austria).

## COVID-19

While COVID-19 has clearly abated from being a global pandemic, at the time of this writing, there have been nearly 7 million deaths, with over 768 million confirmed cases and the administration of over 13 billion vaccine doses (WHO, 2023).

This issue of *JORH*, like previous issues, includes a diverse range of topics relating to COVID-19. Most of these articles will prove historically valuable from a public health view when considering the role of governments, religion, clergy, and their response or lack of response to COVID-19, and the subsequent questions raised. These questions will consider issues such as: (i) how coronavirus restrictions adopted by governments affected world religious groups; (ii) the impact of religious freedom on the exacerbation of COVID-19; and (iii) the patterns of excess death across the USA, particularly within closed religious communities.

Other topics in this issue relating to COVID-19 consider (iv) the role of New York City faith leaders in supporting their congregation's health and well-being during COVID-19; (v) Australian Catholics' experiences involving COVID-19 church

closures; (vi) the effects of spiritual well-being on self-perceived health changes among members of the church of England during COVID-19 in England; (vii) the role of religion and spirituality in coping with COVID-19 infections among people of lower socioeconomic status in Pakistan; (viii) the COVID-19 vaccine discussion among twitter users in Malaysia; (ix) spiritual issues and experiences in Turkish society during COVID-19; (x) an investigation into the relationship between COVID-19 anxiety and spiritual orientation in elderly individuals in nursing homes and care centers in Turkey; and finally, (xi) investigating the relationship between spiritual health, meaning in life, and death attitudes among COVID-19 patients discharged from the ICU in Iran.

## Epilogue and Congratulations

The *JORH* Editors once again hope that readers and researchers will benefit from this collection of research articles. Again, we would particularly look forward to submissions relating to religion, spirituality and Parkinson's Disease and/or articles relating to moral injury and/or suicide.

Finally, a note of congratulations to *JORH*'s Associate Editor, Prof. Harold Koenig (Duke University), who according to Research.Com (2023) was ranked seventh in the USA and 10th in the world for Social Sciences and Humanities for his work on spirituality and health. His 703 publications have earned 66,404 citations!

Added to this was the joyous news that *JORH* is now ranked 1st internationally by Research.Com in the category of 'Humanities and Social Sciences' (Religion) and correspondingly second internationally in the 'Arts and Humanities' Citation Index's Religion list. *JORH* has also now gained an improved ranking of 89th in the Public, Environmental & Occupational Health category and 17th in the category of 'General Nursing'. Overall *JORH* has now achieved a 2.8 Impact Factor. For these achievements, I wish to thank the Associate Editors and all *JORH-Springer* staff (in particular Kimberly Poss, Hemalatha Vedachalam, Priya Gopalakrishna, Subhashini Gopal and their colleagues).

## Parkinson's Disease

*JORH* continues the call for papers regarding Parkinson's Disease. Please refer to the following link for greater detail: <https://www.springer.com/journal/10943/updates/24079232>.

If you would like to make a submission, please submit via the Editorial Manager on the *JORH* web site: <https://www.springer.com/journal/10943/submission-guidelines>.

## Declarations

**Competing Interests** The authors have not disclosed any competing interests.

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