

# CROSSROADS...

exploring the intersection of health, spirituality and faith

Newsletter of the Society for Spirituality, Theology & Health

Volume 1

Issue 3

January/February 2008

## Religion and Health: Effects, Mechanisms and Interpretation

In April 2007, the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health issued a Request for Research Proposals (RFP). This RFP sought proposals to elucidate how religious involvement, such as religious attendance, worship, and altruistic and caring activities, influences individual and community health. The goals of this research program are to document quantitatively effects on health (where health is broadly defined), clarify the biological, social, and psychological mechanisms involved, and more adequately interpret qualitatively what the findings mean for individual, congregational, and community health through trans-disciplinary collaboration and deliberation. The focus is on research that will examine the contribution of context and caring as part of the mechanism that accounts for the effects of religion on health, particularly the effects of membership and practices within faith communities.

In response to the RFP, the Center received 232 letters of intent. These letters of intent represented various organizations including hospitals, mental health facilities, colleges, medical schools, seminaries, nursing schools, public health schools, research organizations and religious organizations. More than ten different religious groups were proposed to be studied including the major religions of the world and the major Christian denominations as well as less common religious or spiritual groups. Twenty-seven letters of intent came from countries other than the United States, and 22 total countries were represented. The researchers represented a variety of disciplines including medicine, nursing, academia, chaplaincy, clergy, research science, criminology, psychology, economics, and health policy.

From the letters of intent, a committee chose 40 projects to submit full proposals. The proposals were reviewed by 26 health professionals or religious scholars not

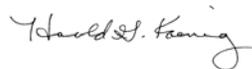
otherwise affiliated with the Center. The reviewers rated the proposals on 13 criteria: (1) degree to which proposal addresses RFP goals and focus; (2) scientific merit (3) qualitative methods (4) scientific environment, academic setting; (5) experience and track record of principal investigator and research team; (6) theological and trans-disciplinary collaboration; (7) potential impact on individual and community health; (8) quality of plan to disseminate the results to opinion leaders in the field; (9) novelty and potential to generate new information; (10) completion of research within two years; (11) willingness to take time and provide travel costs for final meeting; (12) demonstration of strategic impact and cost effectiveness; and (13) degree of cost sharing.

A committee of eleven judges was assembled to make the final determinations regarding funding. During an all day meeting in Durham, North Carolina, the judges chose seven proposals for funding. Funding is to begin in February 2008, and the research will be completed by February 2010. At the completion of the research, the researchers will convene, present their findings, and consider possibilities for further work to build on this initiative.

This research promises to add new insight into the relationship between religion and health with an emphasis on interpretation and implications. The projects include research on minorities and immigrants as well as several different religious traditions. All seek to understand the association between spirituality and health more deeply by attempting to identify processes and mechanisms that contribute to this relationship. Please read more about the selected proposals on page 3 of this newsletter.

Harold G. Koenig, M.D.

Keith G. Meador, M.D.



Co-editors, **CROSSROADS**

## EXPLORE...in this issue

2 Annual Meeting

2 Funding opportunities

3 Insight latest research

4 CSTH Year in Review

4 Calendar of events

---

## ANNUAL MEETING

**The First Annual Meeting of the Society for Spirituality, Theology and Health** will be held June 25-27, 2008 in Durham, North Carolina. The meeting will provide Scholars with the opportunity to present and discuss their latest research and allow participants to establish relationships and share ideas. The meeting will be held at the R. David Thomas Executive Conference Center located at the Duke Fuqua School of Business. All who are interested in spirituality, theology and health are welcome to attend the meeting.

### “Spirituality, Health and Human Flourishing: Meaning? Measurement? Implications?”

The theme of the meeting represents the direction that the field of spirituality, theology and health is moving. The meeting will include a keynote speaker, four plenary speakers, and a variety of paper and poster presentations given by the participants. Poster and paper presentations will be given by scholars from various universities, organizations, and disciplines. Some presentations will focus on the latest empirical research while others will describe interventions and programs already in place that care for the spiritual needs of patients.

### Speakers

The keynote and plenary speakers are recognized as experts in the field of spirituality, theology and health. The keynote address will be held Wednesday evening, June 25 while the plenaries will be on Thursday and Friday of the meeting.

The keynote speaker is *William Roper M.D., M.P.H.*, Dean of the School of Medicine and Chief Executive Officer of the UNC Health Care System. Near the beginning of his career, Dr. Roper held several key positions in Washington, D.C., including administrator of the Health Care Financing Administration. From there he went on to lead the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Formerly the Dean of the School of

Public Health, Dr. Roper has been at UNC since 1997. He is broadly published and acknowledged for leadership in American Medicine having received numerous distinguished service awards from the U.S. Public Health Service, the Association for Health Services Research, the National Association of Health Data Organizations, Emory University, and the University of Alabama.

Opening remarks will be given by *John Templeton, Jr., M.D.* President of the John Templeton Foundation. He works closely with the Foundation's staff and international board of advisors of more than 50 leading scholars, scientists, researchers and theologians to develop substantive programs in this endeavor. Dr. Templeton has been actively involved in the Foundation since its inception in 1987. In 1995, he retired from his medical practice to serve full-time as president of the Foundation. His more than 25-year career as a physician and long-held spiritual beliefs provide both the formal science training and the commitment to advance the Foundation's work.

The plenary speakers will be *Kenneth Pargament, Ph.D.*, Professor of Psychology at Bowling Green University; *John Swinton, Ph.D.*, Professor and Chair in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care and Professor of Nursing at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom and founder of the Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability at the University of Aberdeen; *Ellen Idler, Ph.D.*, Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Institute for Health Policy Research as well as Acting Dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Rutgers University; and *Jeff Levin, Ph.D.*, author, epidemiologist, and religious scholar.

### More information

For more information about the meeting, please visit the Society's new website: <http://www.societysth.org/>

---

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES...

**The Duke Pepper Older Americans Independence Center (OAIC) Research Career Development Program in Aging Research** The objective of the Pepper OAIC Research Career Development Awards Program is to seek the highest quality young investigators who are interested in becoming independent investigators in aging research at Duke University Medical Center. Eligible young investigators must hold a Duke academic appointment at the Instructor or Assistant level. Investigators with NIH K-series (i.e., K01, K08, K23) or R01 awards are not eligible. Investigators who are selected for this program acquire skills needed to have a successful research career through didactic courses, conferences, mentored research projects and the pursuit of mutually agreed upon career goals. Funding is available to take courses that will help the awardees improve their research skills. The deadline for submission of full applications is **February 28, 2008**. The applications will then be reviewed by a Pepper OAIC independent review panel. The two highest ranking applications will be selected for funding with notification of the principal investigator by **March 31, 2008** for a start date of **July 1, 2008**. For full information, please contact Kenneth Lyles, MD at 919.660.7520 or [lyles002@mc.duke.edu](mailto:lyles002@mc.duke.edu).

**Scholar in Residence Fellowship** The Scholar in Residence Fellowship is an innovative new program jointly developed with the United Methodist Conference and the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. The selected candidate who has proven expertise in a field of interest (to be announced) will receive a two-year fellowship award that will enable the development and implementation of a research-based program of critical importance to the community. More information regarding this unique opportunity and a Request for Application contact Dr. Patricia Gail Bray, Executive Director, [pbray@sleh.com](mailto:pbray@sleh.com) and 832-355-8919; <http://www.slehc.org/index.cfm>.

---

## **INSIGHT...latest research continued from page 1**

*Religion and Health: Effects, Mechanisms, and Interpretation – Proposals selected for funding:*

### **A Longitudinal Study of Spiritual Engagement, Self-Transcendence, and Human Flourishing**

John Astin, Ph.D. & Cassandra Vieten, Ph.D., California Pacific Medical Center Research Institute

Proposal Summary: Over the past several years, our team has been engaged in research on the mechanisms by which spiritual practices and experiences as part of participation in lay spiritual practice programs result in improved health and well-being, including psychological, emotional and physical health, as well as aspects of prosocial development such as love, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion and altruism. The study is a prospective cohort study of participants from three lay spiritual practice communities. The aim of the study is to determine to what extent various aspects of engagement in the context of spiritual practice community influence health outcomes, and to what extent this influence is mediated by spiritual practices/experiences.

### **Determining the Relative Effectiveness of Faith-Based and Secular Substance Abuse Treatment Service Providers: A Comparison of Client Outcomes**

Thomas Gais, Ph.D. and Amelia Arria, Ph.D., Rockefeller Institute State University of New York and the University of Maryland

Proposal Summary: The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of religiosity on patient outcomes in substance abuse treatment programs. Participants will be assigned to programs that vary in religiosity, and researchers will measure outcomes such as abstinence, employment, criminal behavior and independent living. Researchers will examine possible mediating factors and causal paths involving religion which may account for program impacts by asking participants about specific religious aspects of the programs.

### **Religion-Health Mechanisms among African American Men and Women**

Cheryl Holt, Ph.D., University of Alabama-Birmingham

Proposal Summary: The researchers propose to study African Americans because they are generally high in religious involvement but also suffer from more health disparities than other populations. The study will examine possible mediators of the religion-health connection including lay caring, spiritual capital, social support, and a healthy lifestyle. This information can later be applied to health promotion and reduction of health disparities.

### **Religion, Aging, and Mexican American Health**

Neal Krause, Ph.D., University of Michigan

Proposal Summary: An ongoing program is assessing race, church-based social relationships, and health in late life through a longitudinal survey conducted with a nationally-representative sample of older whites and older blacks. This study will incorporate a comprehensive survey to assess various facets of religion among older Mexican Americans. This data will then be used to analyze race differences, explore the specific religious beliefs that foster church-based social relationships, and evaluate the effects of church-based social support on health. Social relationships that will be assessed

include social support, close companion friendships, negative interaction, and relationships that arise in formal church roles, such as Bible study groups, prayer groups, and church-based volunteer programs.

### **Understanding Social and Personal Aspects of Faith and Practice Related to Health**

Robert McKeown, Ph.D., University of South Carolina

Proposal Summary: This study will assess aspects of faith and practice that may impact health, such as prayer, beliefs, religious involvement, social capital, trust and outlook on life. Three groups will be compared, a group of adults who have completed a program which sought to create more caring communities, a group of adults who attend church regularly, and a group of adults who do not attend church regularly. In addition, the researchers will examine participants' motivations for group participation, explore mechanisms through which participation benefits health, and develop an instrument to assess social capital, health outcomes, and dimensions of faith and practice.

### **Investigation of the Effects and Mechanisms of Religious Involvement on the Physical and Mental Health of African American Caregivers**

Michael Sheridan, Ph.D., The Catholic University of America

Proposal Summary: The overall aim of the proposed study is to investigate the relative contribution of religious involvement to physical and mental health among African-American caregivers. Specifically, the study will examine the relationship between several measures of involvement (religious attendance, level of engagement, organizational religious activities, non-organizational religious activities, intrinsic religiosity, and self-rated religiosity and spirituality) and indicators of physical and mental health. The research will also investigate the utility of the Spirituality-Stress-Adaptation Model of Caregiving by exploring the linkages between religious involvement, spiritual rewards of caregiving, and caregiving stress and adaptation variables. The proposed study addresses the overall goals of the RFP by contributing knowledge about the influence of religious involvement on individual health and exploring the psychosocial mechanisms underlying this influence.

### **Religious Community and the Hispanic Paradox: A Theological Model of Why Mexican Immigrants have Better Health than Americans**

Patrick Steffen, Ph.D., Brigham Young University

Proposal Summary: The American population is becoming more diverse, with Hispanic immigration playing a large role in this transition. Recently arrived Hispanic immigrants to the United States have lower levels of cardiovascular disease than European Americans, but, as immigrants acculturate, their cardiovascular disease increases dramatically. Preliminary evidence indicates that religiosity is health protective for immigrants. The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate the role of religiosity in cardiovascular disease in Hispanic immigrants as they acculturate to life in the United States. Specifically it is hypothesized that religious community, religious coping, religious behavior, and religious values will buffer against the negative effects of acculturation on health and will be related to low cardiovascular disease risk.

---

## The Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health: The First Year

The first year of our formal existence has flown by. We start 2008 with the excitement of the recent awards to seven research proposals and with the anticipation of the Annual Meeting in June here in Durham. After a successful Call for Papers and Posters for the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society, we anticipate the vibrant contribution which all will make in June.

Monthly seminar Visiting Scholars, including Ken Pargament, Elizabeth MacKinlay, Neal Krause, John Swinton, Byron Johnson and Gail Ironson, have challenged us to look at the field in new ways. Those attending the seminars—nurses, chaplains, physicians, researchers, students, community residents—bring a perspective of both interest and curiosity, contributing with each event to furthering thought in STH. Spring scholars include Jeff Levin, Ellen Idler and Al Dueck. If you are not able to join us for the seminars, complete video recordings of each is available at [www.dukespiritualityandhealth.org](http://www.dukespiritualityandhealth.org).

Each month we are enriched by the meeting of the Community of Scholars, who convene to broaden the understanding of the field of STH. These scholars are a truly trans-disciplinary group of senior academics, physicians, theologians and researchers who help us focus on the challenges of breaking new ground, and of examining how to advance the field. The community of Scholars welcomes the Visiting Scholar each month to participate and contribute.

To complement the seminars, we also convene a literature reading group weekly facilitated by Dr. Meador and Dr. Elizabeth Hooten ([egh@geri.duke.edu](mailto:egh@geri.duke.edu)) to explore the writing and research in the field and to examine how we can pursue other avenues of thought. This core group welcomes new participants either physically at our meetings or virtually through satellite groups that meet to read and discuss the literature. Contact Dr. Hooten to find out how to participate. The Center sponsors 2 post-doctoral students each year. 2007-08 scholars, Michelle Pearce, PhD and Susan Cowchock, MD are conducting research and share in the rich environment that is the Center. Applications for next year's fellowships exceed 20, a vital group of scholars interested in working in the Center.

March 4, 2008 Daniel Sulmasy, OFM, MD, PhD will deliver the annual Larson Lecture in memory of Dr. David B. Larson, a pioneer, mentor and friend of the field of STH. The lecture will be held in the Hock Tower auditorium 2424 Erwin Road at 5:30 pm, with a light reception before. Dr. Sulmasy will deliver "Is Healthcare a Spiritual Practice?" to answer the fundamental spiritual

questions that patients face about meaning, value, and relationship. If it is true, as Abraham Heschel once noted, that "to heal a person, you must first be a person," it follows that clinicians must attend to their own spiritual lives if they are to be effective as healers. This lecture will explore the justification for these claims and their implications for health care professionals.

Come to the Center in the summer to advance your education in the field with week-long workshops taught by Dr. Koenig, Dr. Meador, and a faculty of senior scholars. More information is available on the Center website, [www.dukespiritualityandhealth.org](http://www.dukespiritualityandhealth.org).

The Society for Spirituality, Theology & Health has a new look at its website <http://www.societysth.org/>. We can now accept credit cards for membership fees and for registration for events. Visit the website to keep current with Society activities, to join us in our work or to find out about the upcoming Annual Meeting. We are growing and anticipate your contributions to the work and the programs of the Center.

Come join us.

---

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS...

#### February 2008

14, 21, 28 Spirituality, Theology and Health Literature Reading Group\*

#### March 2008

4 Larson Lecture. Speaker: Dan Sulmasy, OFM, MD, PhD, Sisters of Charity Chair in Ethics, St. Vincent's Hospital; Professor of Medicine & Director of the Bioethics Institute, New York Medical College

6 Spirituality, Theology and Health Seminar.\* Speaker: Jeff Levin, PhD, MPH, Social Epidemiologist and Gerontologist; Adjunct Professor, Duke University Medical Center

13, 20, 27 Spirituality, Theology and Health Literature Reading Group\*

★ **Seminars:** Lunch is provided, registration requested. To register contact: [elizabeth.alford@duke.edu](mailto:elizabeth.alford@duke.edu)

★ **Reading Group:** For additional information please contact Kari Lauderback at [kari.lauderback@notes.duke.edu](mailto:kari.lauderback@notes.duke.edu)

---

Published quarterly by the Society for Spirituality, Theology & Health, Durham, North Carolina

Society for Spirituality, Theology & Health  
DUMC Box 3825, Durham, NC 27710

<http://www.dukespiritualityandhealth.org/sth/>

© 2008 A publication of the Society for Spirituality, Theology & Health. May be reproduced for noncommercial purposes.