

With God's help and complete dependence on Him, we are able to adopt actions that reflect the *responsive way* (*Philippians 4: 13**). Without being connected to Him, we can do nothing (John 15: 5*). At the beginning of each day, let us ask ourselves: Lord, how I can serve You today? And at the end of each day ask: how many lives did I touch today with the love and compassion of Christ? In what situation was I *responsive*? Did I exhibit the *resistant way* in any of my actions or reactions? God values you and I (*Revelation 3: 20**) and He loves us (John 3: 16*). When we value others as God values us; when we look at others with the eyes of Jesus (Mark 6: 34*); our light shines before others and God is glorified in the process (Matthew 5: 16*).

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* All scripture citations are from The New International Version Study Bible, 1984, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1984

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Dispensing Spiritual Comfort

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Pharmacy is what we do. It's how we earn a living, and it is a big piece of how we spend our time. It is our vocation. Did you know that the word, vocation, comes from the Latin word for "calling"?¹ In God's word, we find many examples of this idea of being "called" to do or be something. Do you feel "called" to be a pharmacist? When you go about your daily duties as a pharmacist, do you view your work as something God has called you to do, or did you choose pharmacy as a vocation based on your interests and strengths? Maybe you feel it is a little of both. As a Christ-centered pharmacist, we give our lives to Christ, and this means we also surrender our careers as pharmacists to Him. It means we seek His will in all that we do as pharmacists and we view our job differently than those pharmacists who are not Christians. To the Christian pharmacist, we view our vocation as less of an avenue for making money, but more of a minis-

try. We ask ourselves questions like, "how am I glorifying God at work?" or "who can I serve today at work?"¹ We seek ways to minister to our patients and to please God with our profession. Do you believe God has divine appointments set for you each day? Do you believe He desires to be glorified through your daily work as a pharmacist? As a Christ-centered pharmacist, we should seek opportunities to serve Him, show love to others and share the good news of Christ with those people around us. As a community pharmacist, one way God has opened my heart to serving Him better through pharmacy is by caring for terminally ill patients and their families.

When I graduated from pharmacy school, I worked for an independent pharmacy that provided many different types of services to the community. One important service that was provided was filling prescriptions for

patients under the care of Hospice. Hospice care, as defined by Medicare, is reserved for patients whose who are terminally ill.² Hospice services are provided not only to patients but to their families as well. Hospice attends to the needs of patients to provide them comfort in their final days, and to provide comprehensive services to help patients prepare for death. As pharmacists, we are very accessible to patients and their families. As patients begin to experience the dying process, medications are often needed to improve quality of life in the remaining days. Patients and their families often have questions about these medications and rely on their pharmacists for answers to their questions. As a pharmacist, this was the extent of what I believed was my role in caring for the Hospice patients and families who visited my pharmacy. I provided proper counseling and answered medication-related questions, but I never thought about attending to the spiritual needs of my patients or their families until my Mother-in-law was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. Like most families, when my Mother-in-law was dying of a terminal illness, our family was traumatized. We did not expect her to die this soon and we were experiencing a variety of emotions. Through this process, my Mother-in-law was entrusted to the care of Hospice. My family experienced first-hand the special type of physical, emotional and spiritual care that Hospice provides. As the Hospice nurses made house visits and attended to the needs of my Mother-in-law, they also attended to the needs of my Father-in-law and the rest of our family. It was comforting to our family to be given resources to help us through this process. The care that was provided to our family, through Hospice, was life-changing

for me as a pharmacist. No longer did I view Hospice patients as just another prescription I needed to fill that day or another delivery I needed to make. Instead, I knew first-hand what it felt like to have a family member suffer and die from a terminal illness. I understood the value of having health care professionals attend to the needs of my family from a physical, emotional, and spiritual level. My family's experience with Hospice care gave me a new perspective on the type of pharmacist I wanted to be. It made me determined to do a better job of showing the love of Christ in my work as a pharmacist.

As Christians, we know from God's word that death is not an accident, but rather, an appointment. Ecclesiastes 3 says there is a time to be born and a time to die.³ Death and dying are not popular topics we desire to talk about at the dinner table. For most people the topic of death and dying brings thoughts of sadness and loss, but for Christians, these topics take on a different meaning. As followers of Christ we know that life on this earth is temporary, and one day we will see Him face-to-face and live with Him in paradise. We know the giver of life and we know the giver of hope, and that is Jesus Christ.³ Although many times we are unsure about the spiritual state of our patients and their families, it is at times where death is near that patients and their families turn their thoughts to more eternal matters. When a patient experiences a terminal illness they often begin to become more self-aware and contemplate the meaning of life. In fact, for patients who are terminally ill, spiritual comfort may be more important than physical and psychological health.^{4,5,6} Discovering the importance of caring for a patient's

spiritually has led to 79% of medical schools in the United States offering some form of spirituality in their curriculum.^{5,7} Research demonstrates that our health and well-being are influenced by our spiritual beliefs and practices.^{4,5,6} Many medical schools now require their students to discuss philosophies of spirituality and medicine with the chaplain at their hospital. Medical students are often required to round with the chaplain, visit and pray with patients when requested, and assess the connection between spirituality and healing.^{5,7} Dr. Christina Puchalski is director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health. In 1992, she designed a spirituality and health course at George Washington University School of Medicine. When asked about the importance of implementing spirituality into a medical school's curriculum, Dr. Puchalski responded, "Spirituality is a part of caring for patients. It goes to the very root of who we are."⁸

Pharmacy is what we do. Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."³ Are we intentionally practicing pharmacy for the Lord? How do we apply this scripture to the life of a Christian pharmacist who cares for terminally ill patients? One place we can start implementing this verse into our professional life is through prayer. Below are some practical suggestions on things to consider as you pray:

Start prayer with thankfulness: thank God for the opportunity to serve Him through the profession of pharmacy

- Pray that God be glorified in all you do as a pharmacist
- Pray for the spiritual, emotional,

and physical wellbeing of your patients and their families

- Pray that you recognize the divine appointments God assigns to you each day
- Pray for boldness as you seek to serve and obey Christ
- Pray that you show love to your patients and employees
- Pray for protection from the enemy

“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6³

We are merely travelers here on earth. Unless Christ returns first, our earthly bodies are going to die. As followers of Christ, we have hope knowing that one day we will be given a new body fit for eternity. We have hope knowing that, in Christ, we will spend eternity in paradise with Him.³ We know the giver of hope and have opportunities to share this hope with the patients and families we serve.⁹ Speaking this message of hope takes boldness and bravery but it is what we are called to do in all aspects of our life, including through the vocation of pharmacy. As we practice pharmacy, may we intentionally share the light of Christ with others and bring hope to a lost and dying world.⁹

Some thoughts as you consider ways to care for your patients and their families when suffering with a terminal illness:

- Listen to the Holy Spirit’s guidance
- Study God’s word
- Pray for patients and families and let them know you are praying for them
- Offer to pray with your patients and their families when they visit the pharmacy
- Ask if you can put their name on your prayer list at church
- Refer patients and families to scripture
- Have your staff sign an encouraging card and mail it to the patient
- Be a good listener; show empathy and compassion
- Provide resources in your area for patients and families (Hospice, counseling, support groups, financial support)
- Go the extra mile in providing care for patients (after hours, delivery etc.)
- If the patient passes away, attend the funeral and minister to the family

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Revelation 21:4-5.³

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