



Northern Ireland Healthcare Chaplains Association  
Research Network

Promoting Research by Chaplains

A photograph of a rugged coastal landscape. In the foreground, a suspension bridge made of wooden planks and ropes spans a gap between two rocky cliffs. A person is walking across the bridge. To the right, a paved path with a white wooden railing winds along the top of a grassy cliff. The sea is visible in the background under a clear sky.

# Healthcare Chaplaincy Research: A Practical Guide for Chaplains

SPRING 2020

*'Research is formalised curiosity' (Hurstons)*

Many Chaplains come from a faith background and have found their vocation to care for people who are vulnerable or dying. Although we understood we would be working in a hospital or hospice, many of us didn't really consider the cross-cultural nature of this work. For many of us, the move from faith community into healthcare community has been a culture shock, and that contrast of cultures is most clearly expressed in the phrase 'evidence-based care'.

Since at least the mid-1990s healthcare has become increasingly focused on evidence. And it is clear that the evidence-based paradigm has fundamentally altered medical practice and delivered measurably improved health benefits. Evidence-based care is globally established as the culture of modern healthcare.

While as individuals we accept the health benefits of this culture, as Chaplains some of us resist the challenge it poses to our practice. This culture has never been part of our faith communities and we have no previous experience of its expectations. But the reality is that all aspects of healthcare need to demonstrate not only their value for money, but how and in what ways they benefit patient wellbeing.

As Chaplains we know that our work has value. We see it in the eyes of the patients we visit; we feel it in the relationships we develop. We know that our work makes a difference. We may wonder, then, why we need to prove our value. But the fact is the cost of healthcare is spiralling upwards and resources are finite. Therefore, healthcare managers need to be confident that the care they commission really does benefit patients. This is why evidence-based care matters.

Chaplains are being urged to become research literate. Research literacy does not mean all Chaplains should become active researchers. Few of us have the training or interest in doing that. But it does mean that all Chaplains become familiar with up to date research on matters relevant to the patients in their care.

This may seem daunting; one more thing to add to all the other commitments Chaplains have to juggle. But there is help 'out there' and this Guide both highlights and adds to what is a growing list of resources.

So I thank Rev. Rosie Morton and Rev. Caroline McAfee for their work in creating this Guide and I commend it to you. If you're new to reading research, it will give you some orientation; if you have some familiarity with research, it will remind you of things you may know and encourage you to deepen your involvement in research.

**Rev. Dr Steve Nolan**

Esher, March 2020

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# Introduction

This handbook aims to equip Healthcare Chaplains to engage with Research and provides signposts to guide the process. As members of the multi-disciplinary team, Chaplaincy Research can contribute to a better understanding of spiritual and religious care and the role of the Chaplain.

## What is the difference between Research and Audit?



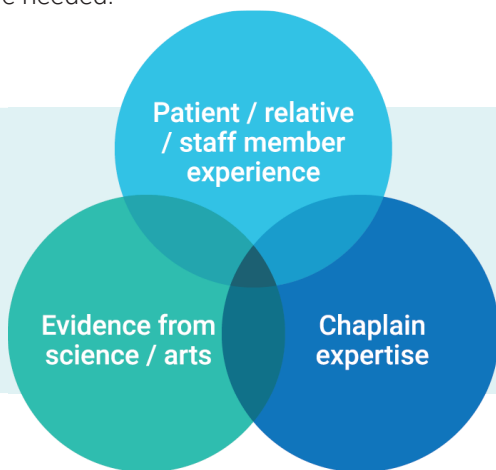
**Research** is a rigorous and systematic process, contributing to a body of knowledge. This can lead to a change in clinical practice, based on new information.



**Audit** aims to review clinical practice and identify what improvements, if any, are needed.

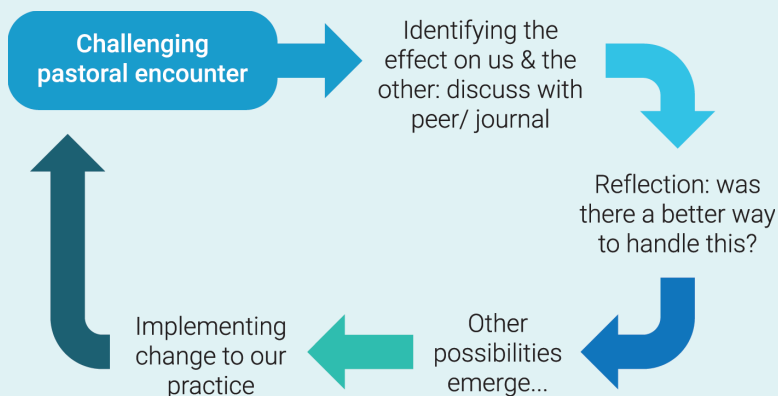
### Evidence based care

connects experience and expertise with available evidence.



## What we are already doing

As Chaplains we can consider how many times we have experienced a conversation with a patient, relative or staff member which has challenged us. This can lead us to reflect on the pastoral encounter and record it in a journal or discuss with a peer. This is where the seeds of inspiration to embark on research can come from. It may encourage us to find out if others have researched what interests us and begin a research project.



## What is happening in Chaplaincy Research?

### Some global examples:

- A survey of patients' expectations of Chaplains at the Mayo Clinic, Minnesota, U.S.A. by Professor Kate Piderman (2010)
- Development of a Spiritual Distress Assessment Tool for use in older person medical rehabilitation by Monod and a Swiss team (2012)
- A taxonomy of Chaplain activities in a U.S.A. palliative care unit by Massey et al (2015)
- Outcomes of Chaplaincy pastoral visits: Patient Reported Outcome Measure, Scottish study by Snowden, A & Telfer, I et al (2017)

## Where might we find time to be involved in research?

The main role as a Chaplain is to give spiritual care and support to patients, significant others and staff who we often meet during life-changing events. Such as: after a birth, during end of life care, following difficult news, adapting to living with health issues. To provide best care, Chaplains do need to find a way to keep up to date with Research.

To date, the majority of Spiritual Care Research has been undertaken by other Healthcare Disciplines. It is now vitally important for Spiritual Care Research to be conducted by Chaplains.

# A Model for Healthcare Chaplaincy Research

Fitchett and Grossoehme recommend that all Healthcare Chaplains become research literate or aware of research and confident in reading research papers. And they suggest that 1-2% of Chaplains will actively engage in research.



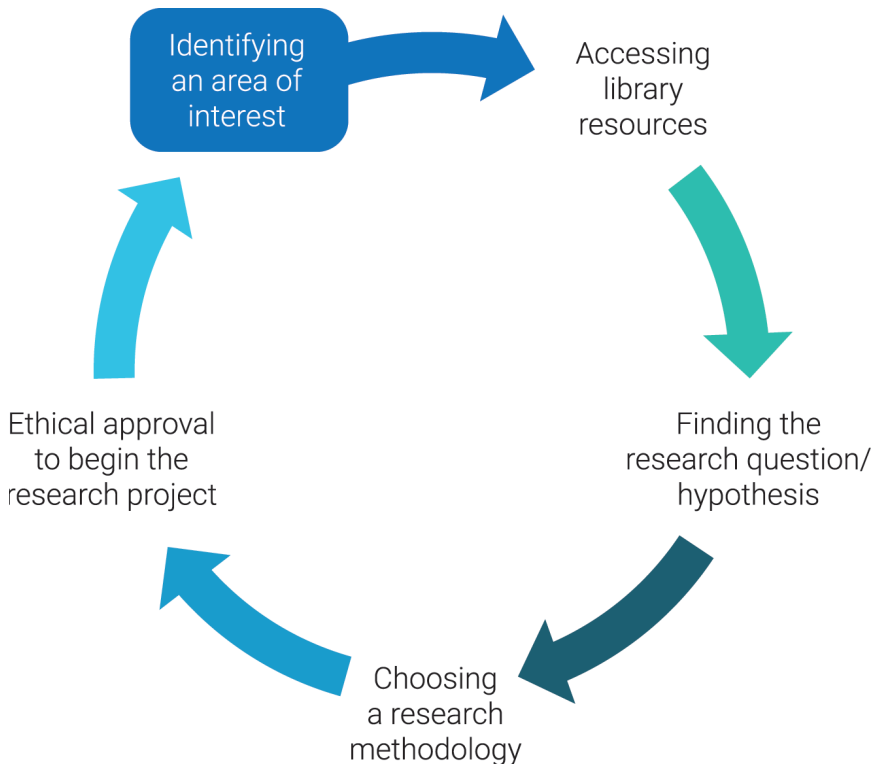
**Source:** Professor George Fitchett

Professor and Director of Research in the Department of Religion, Health and Human Values, Rush University, Chicago.

# Beginning a Research Project

This is a diagram of the beginning of a research project and does not include:

- data collection and analysis
- writing up of the research
- sharing research with others (e.g. NIHCA, Journals, Conferences)



## Role of the NIHCA Research Network

- To provide a network of Chaplains interested in Research who meet regularly. This is open to any Chaplain who is a member of the NIHCA.
- To be supportive to one another in our areas of interest.
- To start a journal club, to learn from current Research papers .
- To establish partnerships with Universities, for example Ulster University.
- To organise Workshops to learn necessary skills for example how to write up a patient Case Study, how to write for publication, how to do a literature search.

## Contacting Us

**E-mail:** [research@nihca.org.uk](mailto:research@nihca.org.uk)

Michael McMillan or Rev. Rosie Morton (Chair & Secretary)



# Helpful Resources

## Websites:

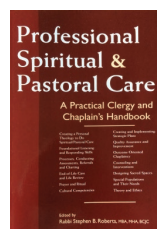
- Transforming Chaplaincy created by Rush University, Chicago  
**[www.transformchaplaincy.org](http://www.transformchaplaincy.org)**
- ERICH European Research Institute for Chaplains in Healthcare based in University of Leuven, Belgium.  
**[www.pastoralezorg.be/page/erich](http://www.pastoralezorg.be/page/erich)**
- Website of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education Research Network. *Each month, a significant research article with a brief summary and comments is available.*  
**[www.acperesearch.net](http://www.acperesearch.net)**

## Key Journals relevant to Healthcare Chaplaincy:

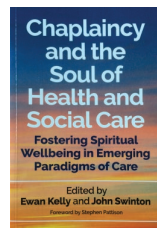
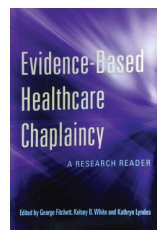
- Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy
- Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling
- Health and Social Care Chaplaincy
- Practical Theology

## Books:

- Fitchett, G. and Grosseohme, D. (2012). Health Care Chaplaincy as a Research-Informed Profession. In: Roberts S.B, (Ed). *Professional Spiritual and Pastoral Care: A Practical Clergy and Chaplain's Handbook* (pp. 387-406). Woodstock, VY: SkyLight Paths Publishing
- Nolan, S. (2015). Making Spiritual Care Visible: The Developing Agenda and Methodologies for Research in Spiritual Care. In: J. Pye, P. Sedgwick and A. Todd (Eds). *Critical Care: Spirituality Engaging the Crisis in Contemporary Healthcare* (pp. 146-157). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Fitchett, G. and Nolan, S. Editors (2015) *Spiritual Care in Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers



- Fitchett, G. and Nolan, S. Editors (2018) *Case Studies in Spiritual Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Fitchett, G., White, K.B., Lyndes, K. (2018) *Evidence – based Healthcare Chaplaincy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Kelly, E. and Swinton, J. Editors (2020) *Chaplaincy and the Soul of Health and Social Care: Fostering Spiritual Well-being in Emerging Paradigms of Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers



### Journal Paper:

- Fitchett, G. (2017). Recent progress in chaplaincy research. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 71, 163-75.

### Useful Handbook:

- Myers G.E. (2014) An invitation to Chaplaincy research: entering the process available as a PDF File on [www.healthcarechaplaincy.org/hcc\\_research\\_handbook](http://www.healthcarechaplaincy.org/hcc_research_handbook)

### Networks promoting research, some examples:

- **Europe**  
ERICH - the European Research Institute for Chaplains in Healthcare, based at the University of Leuven, Belgium, set up in 2017.
- **N.Ireland**  
NIHCA - the N.Ireland Healthcare Chaplains Association Research Network, set up in 2017.
- **NHS Scotland**  
In process

## Online Courses

Rush University, Chicago, U.S.A. available through:  
**[www.transformchaplaincy.org](http://www.transformchaplaincy.org)**

### **RL 101 Introduction to Research Literacy** | 5 week online course

#### COURSE AIMS:

- To understand what is meant by an Evidence-based approach to Spiritual Care and why it is important
- To gain a broad overview of existing Spiritual Care Research
- To learn how and why all Research is not equal through an introduction to major types of Research
- To gain resources to further develop Research literacy

### **RL 102 Exploring Methods in Chaplaincy Research** | 10 week online course

#### COURSE AIMS:

- To understand major types of Research and why they differ in contributing to causal inference
- To understand types of Qualitative Research and their contributions
- To understand Quantitative Research by knowing five common basic Statistical tests and reading tables with confidence
- To develop familiarity with a growing literature

#### **Practical Guide compiled for NIHCA by:**

Rev. Rosie Morton: Hospital Chaplain, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust &  
Rev. Caroline McAfee: formerly Senior Chaplain, Northern Ireland Hospice<sup>©</sup>

#### **Acknowledgements**

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