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**BETH ISRAEL MEDICAL CENTER GOES ZEN**

*At New York's Beth Israel Medical Center, Buddhist Chaplains Offer Prayers,  
Meditation and Spiritual Counseling to the Sick*

New York, NY (July 13, 2009) Beth Israel Medical Center (BIMC) in New York City, continuing a steep tradition of progressive thinking in the realm of integrated care, has partnered with the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care to bring Zen Buddhist chaplains into the hospital to offer bedside meditation, interdenominational prayer and other spiritual support to patients and staff members.

According to the American Hospital Association, about 68 percent of public hospitals have a chaplaincy program. But few have Buddhist monks and the partnership between Beth Israel and the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care is unique. "In most hospitals, there is a rabbi who sees Jewish patients and a Catholic priest who anoints the sick," says the Rev. Koshin Paley Ellison (Koshin), co-founder of the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care. "Yet there are many patients who may benefit from a different type of spiritual counseling. Our guiding values are compassion, equanimity, courage, inquiry and learning." The Zen chaplains encourage stress-and-pain-relief through meditation, breathing exercises or simple conversation, with the understanding that their methods can make a patient more comfortable, more empowered, more accepting of the medical odds they may be facing.

An organization run by Zen Buddhist chaplains, the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care trains healthcare professionals in contemplative approaches to help patients and caregivers face illness, disease, dying and living. While the training is delivered from a Buddhist perspective, the care is accessible and tailored to people of all faiths and traditions.

Their presence can also add a level of spiritual insight for the physicians and hospital staff who treat patients on a daily basis. Co-founders Koshin Paley Ellison and the Rev. Robert Chodo Campbell (Chodo) sit in on and offer insight during morning rounds, when medical teams gather to discuss their cases and determine how to deliver care. They also lead weekly group meditation sessions for staff, patients and families to promote relaxation and healing.

“Our palliative care consult team feels privileged to work closely with a Buddhist monk, whose deep understanding of spirituality in illness, and compassionate response to the very ill, serves our patients and provides a source of support and education to the staff,” says Russell K. Portenoy, MD, Chairman of the Department of Pain Medicine and Palliative Care at Beth Israel.

Koshin and Chodo are no strangers to Beth Israel Medical Center. They both did their training in multi-faith chaplaincy (which was not specifically Buddhist-based) about seven years ago through the hospitals Pastoral Care program, a multi-faith chaplaincy training program that still exists today. “We’ve had a presence in the hospital for nearly eight years,” says Chodo. “But only recently were we able to take it to the next level.”

Two years ago, Chodo and Koshin started bringing their Buddhist student chaplains into the hospital through “Foundations in Buddhist Contemplative Care,” a year-long training program during which students complete 100 hours of clinical work as contemplative care volunteers. Last year, they created “Buddhist Clinical Pastoral Education,” the first Buddhist training program in the country to be accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. Through their partnership with The Healthcare Chaplaincy, this program allows student chaplains to do 100 hours of education and 300 hours of clinical time. These students, called “chaplain interns,” are considered part of the hospital’s clinical team, they sit in on and participate in rounds and counsel patients. In January of 2009, the Nathan Cummings Foundation gave them a grant to expand the program, funding Chodo and Koshin as chaplain supervisors to the 25 student chaplains who now work with patients at Beth Israel.

As of now, Zen Buddhist chaplains and student chaplains visit patients on the following units: maternity; cardiac; medical intensive care unit; neonatal intensive care unit; surgical post-operative unit; emergency medicine; physical rehabilitation; psychiatry; inpatient oncology; HIV/AIDS residence; palliative care; chemotherapy/radiation suites and medical/surgical units. The Zen chaplains are looking for more funding in order to be able to expand their service to other departments throughout the hospital.

If you’re interested in speaking with the Rev. Koshin Paley Ellison or the Rev. Robert Chodo Campbell and/or seeing the Zen Buddhist chaplains in action, please contact Elizabeth Dowling in the public affairs office at: 212-523-4047.

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