

# Chaplains on the front line of healthcare

By **Bill Bartlett**  
Correspondent

When we think of healthcare workers, most likely it's nurses followed by doctors that top the admiration list. Possibly others like lab technicians, therapists, or paramedics are who we think of as at the top rungs of the medical complex. It's unlikely that chaplains would be the first mentioned.

For perspective, Kit Hall, who has served at St. Charles for 23 years said: "Professional chaplains provide a nonjudgmental, listening presence to all. Led by the patient, we assist in discovering or drawing out the strength and power within them to support them physically, emotionally, and spiritually, during times of transition and healing.

"Chaplains provide support for families and staff and serve in a variety of capacities within the hospital system. During times of uncertainty and transition, a caring presence speaks volumes."

Two of St. Charles' six full-time chaplains and three on-call chaplains live in Sisters — Jack Erskine and Ann Bowersox. Erskine has been on staff for 12 years and Bowersox has served over five years.

At the Bend main campus, three chaplains cover all departments within the hospital with shifts that run 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. An additional chaplain serves in a full-time position with the Advanced Illness Management Team (palliative care), two full-time chaplains serve in outpatient hospice, and three on-call chaplains cover time off for the full-time staff and night calls from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.

A chaplain covers Redmond, Prineville, and Madras four days a week, and coordinates Critical Incident Stress Management support

for emergencies that may occur on all campuses and auxiliary facilities.

*The Nugget* asked Erskine what is the most rewarding part of his job. His answer: "Listening and being present to someone who is in need either physically, emotionally, or spiritually. We listen to patients and their families as well as the staff. As I listen I attempt to focus on the sacredness of the moment that happens when people meet people on the deepest level (obviously I don't always connect with every person). I'm touched that people in dis-ease will trust me with their anguish in the midst of their deepest hurt while feeling incredibly vulnerable."

With respect to COVID-19, Erskine said, "COVID has meant more time caring for the staff, especially the RNs. At the beginning of the pandemic they were applauded as heroes; now they are often vilified as they are the gatekeepers letting families know that they can't come into the hospital if they are unvaccinated. They are often bearers of bad news: letting families know that not only can they not see their COVID patient in the ICU, but that the patient will most likely die (or has died)."

The one thing St. Charles chaplains don't care about is your faith, if any. It matters not, and they often have to navigate a patient's or family's bias toward organized religion.

"I do pray with lots of people, but I always ask if that is their practice," said Erskine. "We coach the staff not to ask patients or families if they want the chaplain; instead we ask that they page us if they sense a chaplain visit would be beneficial. The analogy is this: Would you ask a patient if they want the respiratory therapist or an x-ray?"

Bowersox, an on-call chaplain who has been more or less on duty



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**St. Charles employs six full-time and three on-call chaplains to meet the needs of patients and their families.**

constantly since the outbreak of COVID, said: "My calling has always been to be a parish pastor, to build deep and abiding relationships that journey together over time. However, in this season of my life, chaplaincy is offering me new challenges and growing points.

"The relationships that occur with patients and families are often much briefer and the time you have to assess how you can best be of service much more compact. There is a richness though in that conciseness. It really is moments in time, deep and intense moments often, that a chaplain is allowed to share with those who may well have been strangers just minutes before. I view those

moments as a gift every time people allow us to walk with them through the darkest of times for them, even if it is but for a few hours."

In describing some of the more difficult and satisfying parts of her job, Bowersox said: "Another task we are often involved with is trying to find families for those persons who come in and have no ID on them and are not able to communicate. It happens more often than one would think and it is rewarding when we are able to connect their family with them."

In listening to Bowersox, Erskine, and Hall, their passion and compassion are obvious — and they are an essential part of healthcare in Sisters Country.



## Fit For Sisters

**Andrew Loscutoff, Columnist**

Many who frequent the gym year-round love to jab at the new people coming in January. They're an easy target: wide-eyed, with a chip of motivation on their shoulders. They're seen in the wee hours of the morning when, under their own accord, they'd be sleeping soundly. While it is true that many of these people will at some time

## Think people who set goals for the new year are silly?

lose this newfound lifestyle, they are actually moving the needle in their lives and needn't be ribbed for doing so.

In a study, researchers examined New Year's resolutions and tried to correlate how successful these people were with some data. Here's what they found: 66 percent of goals were to do with diet, exercise, and weight loss. After one year, 55 percent of people reported success in their resolution. The type of language mattered: 58 percent vs. 47 percent success in action vs. avoidance goals (more on this later).

While people failed, more actually succeeded. That may have something to do with knowing that a researcher was going to question them on a monthly basis, but this shows that not everyone is a lemming with their head in the clouds when making New Year's resolutions.

Here are some ways that a person can claim success from a New Year's resolution. Did they gain a skill? Perhaps they figured out how to better organize their time, prepare, be more efficient, push unnecessary things, and focus. This is a success regardless of whether or not they met a goal metric. Did they make progress? So what if they didn't lose 20 pounds? Did they lose 10? Did they set up a system for eating better? Are they giving effort?

It's very cynical to think someone who set a goal and is making an effort to accomplish something is foolish. Support our compatriots in health and wellness, and respect their effort. Even better, help someone do better goal-setting.

Speaking of goal-setting, here are some tips to set goals that can bring more success:

Use affirmative goals instead of

avoidance language. For example, a person will eat veggies every night for dinner instead of "don't eat carbs."

Make the goal process-oriented, such as working out three times a week. This allows flexibility in the outcome while you might find you gain muscle and lose fat, which might result in little weight loss.

Now, give the goal a deadline, but keep it in perspective. A weekly or monthly goal is a lot easier to achieve, and doesn't seem so far that you presume you have a lot of time to get there.

Goal-setting isn't about achieving a goal per se, but more about a learning process and making incremental steps forward.

Cut people trying to keep New Year's resolutions some slack, because they are usually pretty genuine and are putting forth effort.