

TITLE: How Can Technology Better Support Spiritual Care? Guidance and Future Innovations for Spiritual Care in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic

SUMMARY:

This workshop will explore opportunities and challenges in technology-based spiritual care for patients and their support communities. Reflecting work conducted collaboratively between CaringBridge.org and an interprofessional team of computer scientists and spiritual care experts, participants will receive education in online spiritual support and opportunities to contribute to future research agendas for tech-based spiritual care interventions.

Upon completion of this workshop, you will be able to:

- Describe prerequisites and characterizing aspects of online spiritual support
- Discuss best practices for helping patients to utilize online spaces for spiritual support
- Compare and contrast future possibilities for tech-based spiritual care interventions in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major shift toward online and remote care paradigms across all areas of healthcare, highlighting an urgent dearth of spiritual care providers [1]. Little work has examined tech-based interventions for increasing the availability, accessibility, and diversity of spiritual care options [2], yet technology can facilitate crucial forms of support that are difficult or impossible without it, especially when care must be provided remotely. For example, CaringBridge.org is an online health journaling platform that provides community support for over 40 million users annually, including patients and caregivers coping with life-threatening illness [2-4]. In this workshop, Estelle Smith, Ph.D. (a Postdoctoral Associate at the University of Colorado and interprofessional researcher in social computing and spiritual care), will first describe results from her dissertation work with CaringBridge [2-4], including the derivation of an operational definition of “spiritual support” through focus groups with CaringBridge stakeholders, as well as three prerequisites and six characterizing aspects of spiritual support exchange. Next, workshop participants will engage in structured, interactive discussion and ideation activities designed to explore considerations of online privacy and sensitive disclosures, and discuss tensions, challenges, or unintended consequences of technology use for spiritual support during a health crisis, especially social media such as CaringBridge, Facebook, Reddit, etc. These activities will offer: (1) guidance and best practices for helping patients to use technology effectively for spiritual support; and (2) opportunities for spiritual care providers to contribute ideas for improving and expanding existing technologies, or designing future tech-based interventions.

Citations

[1] Ferrell, Betty R., et al. "The urgency of spiritual care: COVID-19 and the critical need for whole-person palliation." *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 60.3 (2020): e7-e11.

[2] Smith, C. Estelle, et al. "What is Spiritual Support and How Might It Impact the Design of Online Communities?." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 5. CSCW1 (2021): 1-42.

[3] Ma, Haiwei, et al. "Write for life: Persisting in online health communities through expressive writing and social support." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 1. CSCW (2017): 1-24.

[4] Smith, C. Estelle, et al. "I Cannot Do All of This Alone" Exploring Instrumental and Prayer Support in Online Health Communities." *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)* 27.5 (2020): 1-41.