

WE ARE ALL STUDENTS AND THE TEACHER IS GOD

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Abstract: This paper analyses the contributions to the journal over the last ten years and draws conclusions about the nature of research into spiritual care and raises some questions for the future. The Editors

Key words: Chaplaincy, education, research, spiritual care.

Thank you for the invitation to be here on this very important occasion. To be here at Crieff is very special to me for several reasons. First, it is an opportunity to meet in person, people I have already met in other ways over the last 10 years, as I have read their words, considered their ideas, and also written to some about those ideas, and their ministries. Second, it is special because I hope that this morning, we will have the opportunity to talk together about some questions that I will raise with you. As most of you already know, I read quite extensively in the field of pastoral care, as well as in various behavioural science fields. Until late last year I was, like most of you, a full-time chaplain and educator. I had little opportunity to talk with colleagues from outside the U.S. This conference gives me that golden opportunity which I welcome. But there is one final and personal reason why it is very special to be here in Scotland. As some of you know, I have family links to your country. My great-great-grandparents all emigrated from Scotland to New Zealand in the early 1840s. Those on my mother's side of the family came from Perthshire.

I am very glad and honoured to be here with you.

When Tom Gordon conveyed the invitation to speak with you, he was fairly vague about the topic the planning committee wished me to address. If you knew me well, Tom, you would appreciate that such a degree of vagueness is a little dangerous. Give me space, and I shall run! And that is what I would like to do this morning.

After some reflection, I have decided that I will do the following. I would like to begin by having you

look with me at the Journal in a broad fashion over the last 10 years. And then I would like to raise some questions for us to think about together. In doing so, I want to make it very clear that my questions will not be asked out of any sense that in the US, chaplains have greater wisdom about preparation for, or insights into the practice of chaplaincy. In fact, Fred Coutts may well be right when he suggests that chaplaincy here in Scotland should be looking toward Europe, rather than toward the U.S. However, I think it is useful for us to ask questions of each other in order to gain new perspectives on different aspects of our professional lives.

I am always asking questions. I trained as a scientist, a chemist, before I went to seminary. In that experience, I learned the importance of asking questions carefully. But long before that, apparently, I had also been asking questions. When I was in New Zealand earlier this year, a cousin told me a story about myself that I had never heard before. She told me that when I was as young as four years old, I would follow my grandfather around his farm all day asking, "But why, Granddad?" until he would insist that my grandmother took me inside the house! And so, this morning you will find me asking "why", and sometimes "why not"?

In preparing for this morning, I was curious about the path of the Journal over the past 10 years, or to be more precise, from the start in 1998 through the first issue of last year. Overall, the editors and the contributors, I believe, have done a wonderful job not just in starting a new publication, but ensuring that it became stronger with each issue. In the same decade, other pastoral care publications have been struggling to survive. One journal which had been in

existence for 20 years, (Ministry, Society and Theology) and which has had approximately the same membership base to support it, ceased publication last year. Yet your publication has continued to produce what I believe are thoughtful, relevant, and helpful material for busy chaplains seeking to provide relevant ministry in demanding, and rapidly changing environments.

Let us begin with some facts about the Journal. There have been 139 contributions to the Journal in the decade, not counting editorials, book reviews, and my abstracts. There have been 107 contributors. There have been three editors. Surely, these people deserve our thanks for their willingness to put themselves and their ideas before us all. In passing, perhaps it would be appropriate to note those persons who have been in the most frequent contributors to the Journal. Without them, the Journal would have been immeasurably the poorer.

I would like to turn now to a closer examination of the Journal's content. As I stated before, I am going to do this so that I can then raise some questions which I hope will lead to some fruitful exchanges of ideas. In preparation for this morning, I began by re-reading each issue and creating a method for categorizing each contribution. The editors have already done this another way, and it can be found on the web site. They have gathered articles according to a keyword reference list, selecting 24 keywords under which papers have been grouped. In some cases, a paper appears under more than one key-word. In my re-reading of the journals, I asked of each article: what kind of article is this? What was the intent of the writer as they wrote? What did she/he hope their creativity would accomplish? I ended up identifying eight categories, which I will now briefly define and describe.

A working taxonomy

Concept Formation

The papers in this category deal with the development of a new concept, or the further development of an old one. For example, in the last decade, a great deal has been written about spirituality, how best we may understand the concept; its place in health care; who owns the concept, and so on. There have been many papers printed in the health-

care literature on the subject. Right now, there have been about 250 and counting.

Another concept is that of competencies. These are the papers which deal with the expanding of that concept into the practice of chaplaincy. Of course, chaplains are not alone in attempting to accomplish this. In the U.S. at least, medical schools are also attempting to do the same thing with their students, as are schools of social work, and educators training teachers.

Now as you will quickly appreciate, the task of concept formation sits up against the need for research to develop a better understanding of the concept; also the problem of how to implement the concept itself, once it has been articulated and described. In my taxonomy, this category is primarily about the process of identification and clarification of concepts, and only secondarily about these other aspects.

Conference reports

There have been a small but important number of contributions linking readers to pastoral care developments within Europe, in Africa, and also in the UK.

Descriptive

This category is intended to include papers which provide information about new ventures in chaplaincy. These are about the pioneering efforts of chaplains. They include: working in the full body protection with SARS patients; in establishing a help-line in the face of an organ-retention scandal -- to mention just two. This group of papers document and describe the creativity of chaplains in emergencies, when they are called upon to use their best thinking and energies in order to meet the demands of unexpected or changing situations.

Educational

The papers in this category are those intended to expand our cognitive awareness; to help the reader learn about the unfamiliar or about a field that is part of another profession, but one which impinges upon his own. An example would be the article on pain by Sugden in Volume 4 # 2.

Homiletical/Meditative/Poetry

This category might be better called "soul food." While in a general sense, many articles which are

included in other categories may nourish our souls, there are only a few in the journal whose purpose is simply to do just that. There were, for example, some poems in the first issues of the Journal. We may want to discuss whether their absence in recent issues is a gap that might be filled in future issues. Do any of us have early morning wakings where our hearts find release through creative musing?

Professional practice of chaplaincy – clinical

This category is intended to include new acts of ministry engaged in by chaplains. The papers within this group are descriptive and include, for example, those which describe: how to actually conduct a spiritual assessment; how to lead a particular kind of group; the creating of a new pastoral ritual when a traditional ritual would not be appropriate.

How is category 3 different from this one? I think the distinction is a pragmatic one: the papers which I have identified as “Descriptive” have had their origin in rapidly-developing situations, where a pastoral response had to be created on the fly. This clinical practice category includes articles describing activities where there was more time to consult others, refer to the literature and are generally more likely to continue over a longer period of time.

Professional development of chaplaincy - systemic

The previous category was about the ministry of the chaplain, alone with a person, family, or group. This category includes those papers which deal with the development of the profession of chaplaincy. For example, the reshaping of chaplaincy within the National Health Service in the past decade has meant that there have been many papers that will be included in this category. Much of the content in Volume 7 # 2, and Volume 8 # 1 includes this kind of material.

Research

Finally, there have been the research articles. By my count, 16 of them, though it was not always easy to decide whether an article was truly a research article or not. Or was it even intended to be? Some clear examples of research papers would be: “*Sup-*

porting families when treatment is withdrawn from neonates; parental views on the role of the chaplain in such situations.” (Volume 3 # 2), or “*Creating and conducting an audit*” in Volume 8 # 1 would be another. Many of the research papers were easy to recognize because the author(s) said that they were reporting a research project. There were others who were reporting what I would consider research, but who did not identify their work as such, whether from a lack of recognition that they had actually engaged in some research, or for some other reason.

This then is the taxonomy I developed. You may be wondering: why go to the trouble of doing so. There is a certain “is-ness” to the Journal. Why bother? I think there can be benefit from looking at material in different ways. One of the ways in this case is in order to ask ourselves: in the present composition of its contents, is the Journal best serving the chaplains of Scotland, or should the ingredients be changed? I have no pre-conceived answer to such a question, but simply asking the question may have value for editors and readers. (I should add that I am not naïve enough to think that the editors have a great deal of latitude in making decisions about what might will be included in the publication. There are, after all, only a limited number of potential contributors within Scotland.)

My purpose in creating a way of identifying and separating the different kinds of articles is because I believe there needs to be a healthy balance among the different kinds of materials a chaplain is exposed to over a period of time, in order to keep professionally healthy. There are some clergy whose idea of reading the daily newspaper is to simply turn to the racing pages. New issues will always arise because of changing circumstances and these must be addressed in creative and timely ways. This is the challenge for the editors, to keep their fingers on the changing pulse of the profession, and the milieu within which chaplains minister. But it can be the role of the readership to reflect on their needs as consumers, and to provide feedback as to the best mix for the times in which they are working. What does the mix of the past 10 years look like? And did that mix meet your needs? There will be opportunity for us to discuss this a little later.

The Mix of the Last Ten Years

Diagram 1

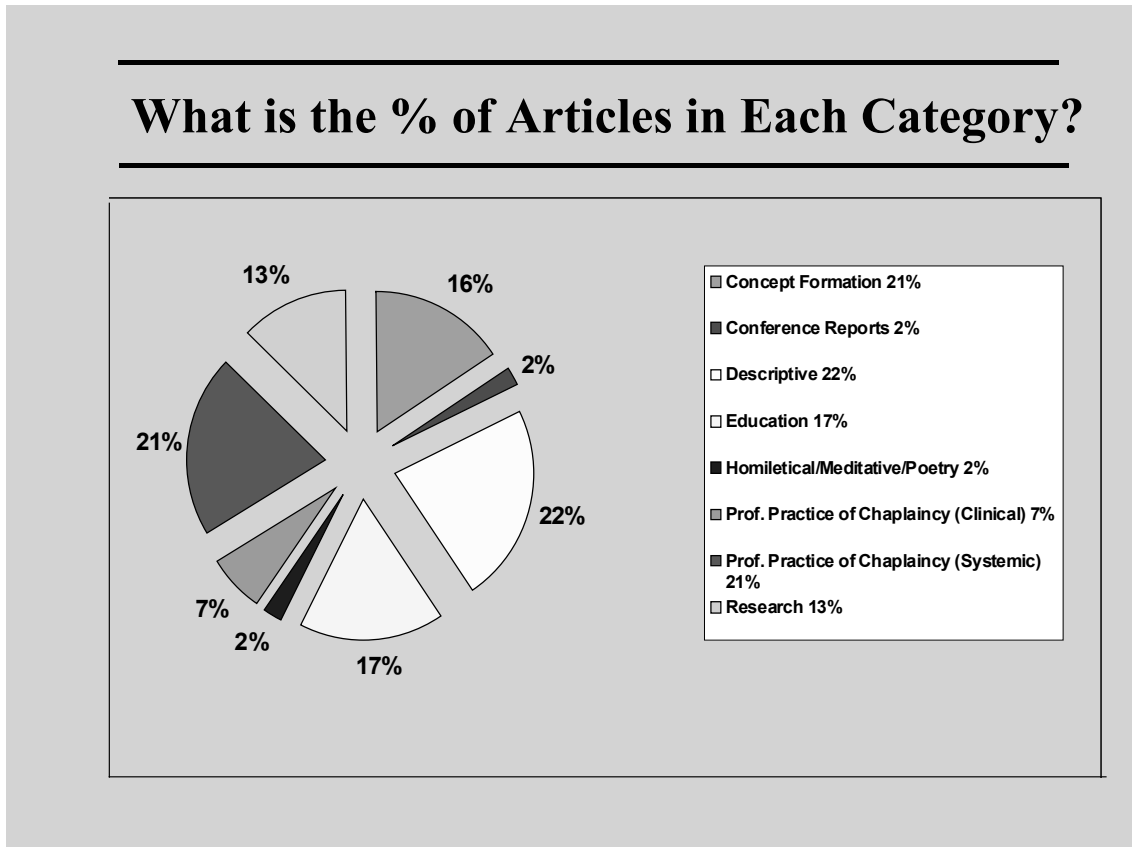


Diagram 2 shows the professional backgrounds of the journal's contributors. The question I would bring to you, and most certainly not want to leave just with the editors, is this; would you benefit from even more different perspectives from across some professional boundaries?

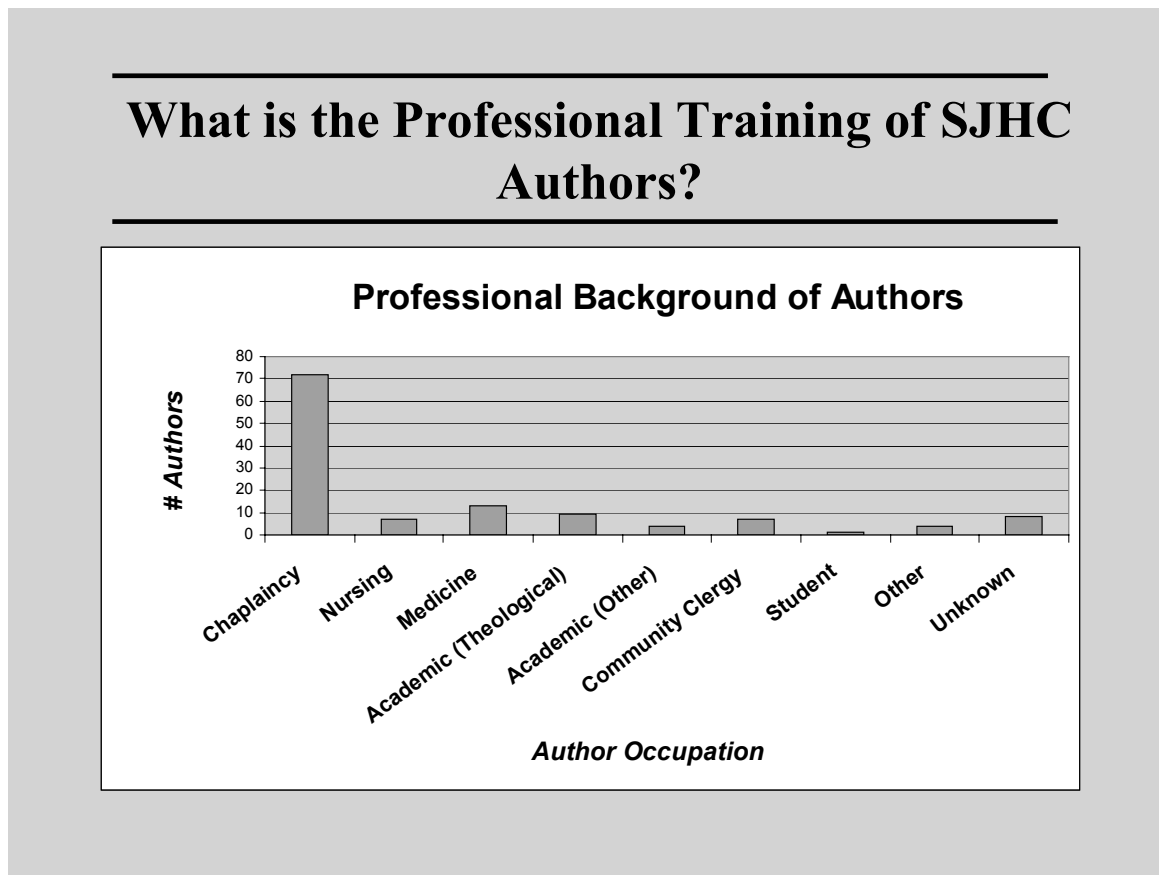
I believe that it is both useful and stimulating to engage with colleagues, whose backgrounds are not the same as our own. It is challenging and rewarding to be at the boundary and to be talking with persons who have different perspectives from our own; whether this is because we trained in different professions; were raised in different cultures; or practice different religious faiths. The theologian Paul Tillich often described himself as living "on the boundary." He even made that phrase the title of his

autobiography. For him, the boundaries were between theology and philosophy, between essence and existence, between Europe and America, and between the findings of science and theological insights. I share some of Tillich's boundaries, and add a few more: between commitments to empirical research and commitments to other forms of knowledge (including those gained by intuition and meditation); between the basic tenets of my Christian faith and contemporary spirituality. Living on the boundary between ministry which I practice out of the Christian tradition, on the one hand, and the sciences which drive modern health care, on the other hand, is a precarious life. We must be careful to neither fall into the often examined presuppositions of, for example, secular spirituality, nor remain

rigidly attached to the forms and practices of our received religious traditions. I wish to turn now to actually engage in the last category of the eight I described above: Research. I

thought that I should present some findings here that may surprise you. Writers have now referred to previous articles in the Journal a total of 19 times.

Diagram 2



Because that number is still fairly small, it is I think, unwise to try and make too much from it; there is no trend. However, it does suggest that people do actually read what is published, and are thinking about the ideas and findings of their colleagues.

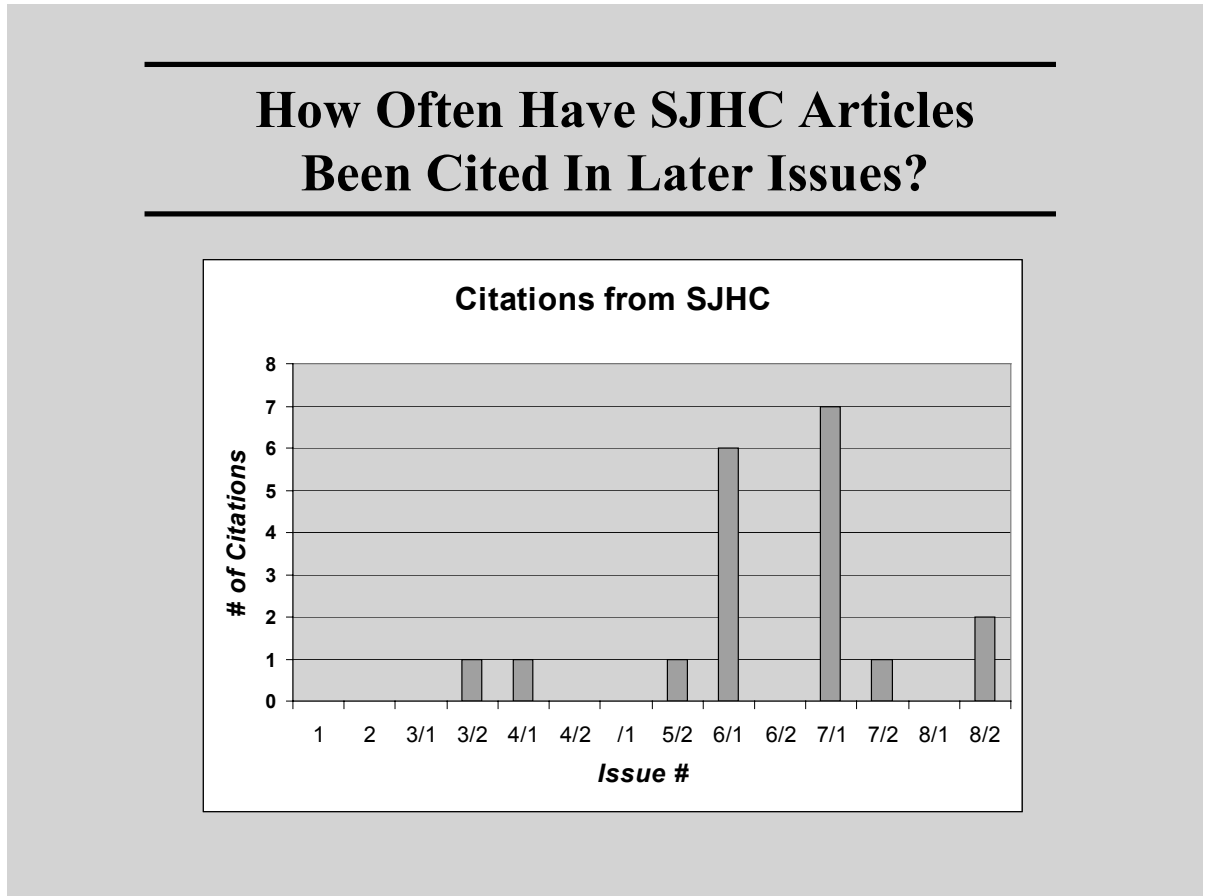
So who is doing the research, or more precisely, what is the professional background of the researchers who are being published. (Diagram 2) The majority are chaplains, though valuable contributions are being made by persons from other professions. (I

hope you will consider joining the 12 in the next decade.)

Anyone who has undertaken a research project, knows the value of doing some preparatory reading. I am saddened when I read the work of some of my US colleagues who present a research paper which reflects no prior dialogue between themselves and other who have traversed the territory they have now explored. It may be the product of American commitment to individualism, but it appears to me that some chaplains believe that they have to go it alone when it comes to pursuing a fuller understanding of

some aspect of chaplaincy. As a profession, we really do not have the luxury of

Diagram 3



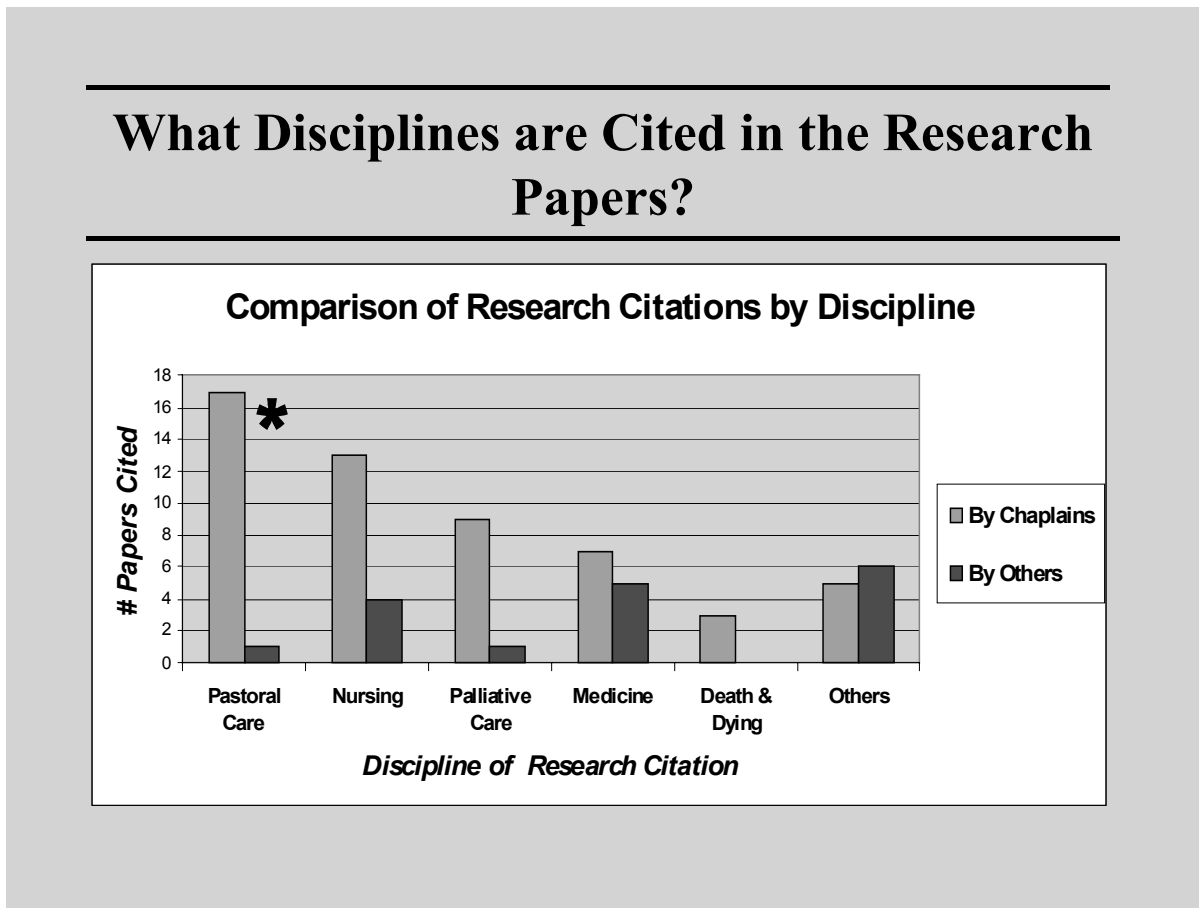
reinventing wheels. Nor do we have to. I recall going to a presentation at a chaplains conference four or five years ago, and attending a seminar which took my interest because I had made a presentation on exactly the same subject over 30 years ago. I was not surprised when the presenter made no reference to my now outdated work. I was very surprised when the presenter made no mention of any subsequent work by any chaplains on the same subject in the intervening years. I am even more surprised when teachers in the field of pastoral studies do the It is clear, however, that a great deal of reading is being done by some of those who report their research to the Journal. I must admit to a bias in my

same thing. And this may part be of the problem. In our preparation for ministry, we were all encouraged to read books. We were almost never encouraged to go to the current journals. The majority of the citations in every issue of the Journal are books. I still remember when I joined those of my class who were going to graduate in chemistry, being taken by the professor of the department up to the departmental library. He took us in, looked at us and said: "You will be ready to graduate when you have learned to use this library." It was mostly full of journals. reading and preparation for research. I read many more journal articles, than I read books. This is primarily a matter of stewardship of time on my

part. However, I have also discovered that many useful books have been preceded by articles and papers by the same author. The real task is to be able to locate them. However even this is becoming increasingly straightforward because of the Internet, and our now ability to search a variety of databases. I believe that your Association is to be strongly commended for making the Journal available to all chaplains via the Internet. I believe that you are the only chaplains in the world to do so, and I applaud your generosity in taking this step.

The writers whose research has been published in the Journal have searched the appropriate literature, but sometimes not very far. (Diagram 3) Here we see the papers cited from different professional fields in the 16 research papers. However, one of those papers has distorted this picture. It has 13 citations from the pastoral care literature, and when they are removed, the picture looks like this. (Diagram 4) I also want to draw your attention to the fact that the results of chaplains and others are grouped in this diagram for convenience. They are not being compared.

Diagram 4



Looking at diagram 4, there are two questions I want to leave you with:

- a) Why is the number of citations from the pastoral care literature so low?
- b) Why are some disciplines essentially absent? Mental health. Psychology. Health psychology. Sociology (society and medicine). The subject of meaning-making from any one of several disciplines.

I am acutely aware that chaplains have heavy demands made upon their time. At least, that is true in the U.S. and I am assuming that this is also true here in Scotland. This is one of the reasons often given when chaplains explain why they do not have time to write about their ministry. A second reason why chaplains are often unfamiliar with ideas from other disciplines that might be of potential value is lack of access to the publications of those disciplines. Fortunately, the Internet is changing that even as we speak.

But the greatest challenge that I think we need to be considering is how to be talking with others at the boundaries; not talking in order to provide ministry on a daily basis or to solve particular problems in specific situations, but engaging in ongoing conversations that may lead to deeper mutual enrichment and even more effective ministry. The pastoral care literature of 30-40 years ago indicates that there were chaplains and other health care professionals who met regularly to discuss a variety of subjects, especially those where their professions overlapped. One of the older journals, the *Journal of Religion and Health* (which is cited in at least one of the *Journal's* articles, but not by a chaplain) is the product of an organization that was established to ensure such conversations – the Institute of Religion and Health. Historically, there have been journal clubs in hospitals where such inter-disciplinary conversation could take place. They have often been intra-departmental in nature. If you have a particular field of interest in your ministry, have you ever considered inviting some other professionals to have lunch and talk together about that interest? An inter-departmental club.

Alternatively, and picking up on an idea from Yvonne Hendrie's article: (Volume 5 # 1) have you ever considered inviting some local clergy into your institution to introduce them to your world of activities and ideas? I believe that chaplains – because of

where we work in society today – have a great deal to offer religious communities as they wrestle with issues of inter-faith communication, as well as issues of religious relevance.

My wife has a friend who was hospitalised recently for a procedure, which was done under local anaesthetic. As part of the procedure, she had a catheter inserted into a femoral artery. When the procedure was over, the removal of the catheter was left to a medical student by a more senior medical resident. The student withdrew the catheter, which left blood spurting to a considerable height from the woman's artery. This in turn caused the student to run from the room exclaiming: "Oh my God, oh my God." Fortunately, the resident was just outside the woman's door. He immediately understood what had happened, ran back in to the room and with one seeming practiced movement put his thumb on the one spot which immediately stopped the flow of blood. The medical student was very impressed. This was something he had not yet learned how to do. Anxiously, he asked the resident whether there was something he could read to learn how to do what he had just seen. The resident told him that there was a video in the library from which he had learned this technique. "What do I ask for?" asked the student. "It's a movie called *Blackhawk Down*," said the resident.

There is much to learn if we are to be effective chaplains. Much of what we need to know we did not learn at university, nor in theological college. God has lessons for us to learn, but in order to do learn them, we must be open to the leading of God's spirit whether that comes through the promptings of patients, nurses, doctors, other health care professionals, or other chaplains.

I hope that The Scottish Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy will also continue to be an additional and strong way in which we are all prompted in teaching by God, so that we can continue to grow into the ministries of God's calling.

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