

Bob Snyder and **Diane Vescovi** look at equipping healthcare professionals to share Christ with their patients



THE SALINE PROCESS

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WORLDWIDE

key points

- Christian health professionals have a unique opportunity to improve spiritual health, but often struggle to integrate faith and practice.
- With Saline, medics are equipped with vital tools that work and help people overcome barriers to being a workplace witness.
- Role-play and discussions help to work out the practicalities of sharing faith with patients.

Every Christian health professional has a unique opportunity to improve their patients' physical and spiritual health. Many, however, feel frustrated by the challenge of integrating faith and practice within time constraints and legal obligations.

Medical literature increasingly recognises the important link between spirituality and health¹ and GMC guidelines approve discussion of faith issues with patients, provided that it is done appropriately and sensitively.²

Many CMF members are already familiar with *Saline Solution*, a day course designed to help Christian healthcare professionals bring their faith and daily work together. It has helped growing numbers throughout the UK become more comfortable and adept at practising medicine that addresses the needs of the whole person.

But few will be aware that 'the Saline Process' is bearing fruit all over the world. Now adapted for working in any cultural context, its global influence for Christ in healthcare has been growing steadily. Training has already been conducted in 72 countries for the equipping of 11,000 workers.

Effective and evidence-based

Over the past six years, in places as diverse as Egypt and Guadeloupe, Saline has proven that being a witness in the workplace can and should be the result of *overflow* and not *overwork*. 'Being' a witness means being set free from 'doing' witnessing. Jesus said, 'You are the salt of the earth and the light of world.' He did not say 'act like salt and strive to be luminous'. He intended us to be as we are – as he is – in the world. With the training and support of Saline, medics are equipped with vital tools that work and help people overcome barriers to being a workplace witness. The process is collaborative with God's Spirit and carried out with permission, sensitivity and respect. Once trained, people often tell us they feel a burden has been lifted from their shoulders. They come away with the sense that being a witness is not a technique; it is an outgrowth of walking with the Lord, answering the call to be Christ's disciples in healthcare.

The training begins by looking at scientific research into why faith is important in healthcare. Harold Koenig, one of the foremost researchers in this field, reports that since 1997 an explosion of

literature has overwhelmingly shown the favourable outcomes of integrating faith into healthcare. Articles appear in so many journals of multiple disciplines that Koenig calls it 'a massive research literature that is scattered throughout the medical, social, and behavioural sciences'.³

Integrating faith and practice

Given the practical nature of being a witness, eight tools to equip witnesses are the core substance of the Saline Process:

1. **Prayer** is crucial for finding ministry opportunities in the midst of daily living.
2. **Asking Questions** is the basis for wise communication and assessing spiritual condition.
3. Taking a **Spiritual History** provides insight into a patient's spiritual journey and present needs.
4. **Faith Flags** are brief statements in the course of natural conversation that identify you as someone for whom a relationship with God, prayer, or the Bible is important.
5. **Faith Stories** explain how God, prayer or a biblical principle became relevant in your life or someone else's life, which is helpful when you sense a door opening further.
6. A **Truth Prescription** recommends something to do, to read or to watch.
7. Building a **Spiritual Referral Team** taps the resource of others of Christ's disciples who exhibit the Five Cs (see below) and are able to pick up where your involvement leaves off.
8. **Gospel Presentation** is our preparation to explain what a Christian is, and to do so accurately and concisely when the time comes.

Undergirding the eight tools are five characteristics of Christ's disciples, the 'Five Cs' of spiritual vitality that need to be present for a witness to use the tools effectively. These are Christ-like character, Competence, Compassion, wise Communication and Courage. In the context of Saline training, this means that we are first of all responding to patients' needs in ways that promote being trusted, with one listening ear toward the bedside and the other toward the Great Physician.

Monitoring a patient's responses is essential. During the training, a role-play is used to show how an encounter can go well or poorly, depending upon whether the patient's responses are heeded. This hands-on approach, and the practicality of the tools that meet patients at their point of need, have often been cited as the best feature of the training.

Since these tools are meant to be used with sensitivity, permission and respect, and given the weight of evidence from the research, we have solid ground on which to stand when facing opposition to the proclamation of faith. But of course we are not immune from attempts to quash the movement of God in healing, redeeming and restoring his image in those we meet. Courage is among the Five Cs for the reason that we need it in great amounts as Christians in healthcare, wherever in the world we work.

A global partnership

A great benefit of Saline today is that its support and promotion come through a partnership of nine healthcare organisations⁴ which are united in their commitment to see every Christian healthcare worker being a skilled witness for Christ.

The International Saline Partnership, coordinated by IHS Global (previously International Health Services⁵), which developed the course, includes four organisations with international reach and five, including CMF UK, which are regionally focused. All of them have covenanted together to see their impact maximised around the world.

When it launched the Saline Process in 2007, IHS Global began immediately to employ the best methods for supporting trained workers in terms of follow-up coaching and the encouragement of a learning community connected online. In addition, the Saline Process set out to impact all healthcare professionals, reflecting the daily reality of multi-disciplinary team working.

Trained witnesses receive coaching from a multiplying trainer, who also identifies if a worker would be willing and able to pass along the learning to others. Saline trainers facilitate learning and instil confidence for gaining skills, rather than transmit knowledge. One does not need to be a gifted teacher in order to be a partner in the learning process and in cultivating faithful responsiveness to the call: 'You shall be my witnesses' (Acts 1:8).

When the partner organisation leaders and trainers came together in Budapest, Hungary for a three-day leadership summit in January 2014, they discovered how much they are motivated by God's call and how much that is an encouragement to one another! Among those present at the recent summit were sisters and brothers from countries where sharing the gospel is restricted and even forbidden.

Travelling from 20 countries that included Egypt, Spain, India, Norway, Paraguay, South Africa and the United Kingdom, the family of God gathered to celebrate their past and present impact for Christ in healthcare and planned for a future of continuing influential ministry. July 2014 presents an opportunity to experience the encouragement of the Saline Process during the ICMDA World Congress in the Netherlands when the training will be offered as a pre-conference stream.⁶

Why not take a closer look at the Saline Process? If you have been through it already and are putting into use the principles and tools, you could be equipped as a trainer. The team of trainers and coaches is growing in diverse cultural and medical environments worldwide. Most thrilling of all is the unity of God's Spirit drawing it all together in faith. So much is in place – and there is a place for you in it. Our prayer is for you to find that place.

Bob Snyder and Diane Vescovi work for IHS Global, which coordinates the International Saline Partnership.



SALINE
SOLUTION

bringing faith
into healthcare

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references

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