

Spiritual Care Competences Framework for Primary Care Chaplains

Adapted from the UK Board of Healthcare Chaplaincy [Spiritual Care Competences for Healthcare Chaplains \(2020\)](#)

Domain 1 Professional practice

Domain 1	Professional practice	
Element 1.1 Knowledge and skills for practice	<p>Knowledge and skills for practice: Primary Care Chaplains continually develop and update their knowledge of spiritual and religious care, current policy, and research evidence relevant to chaplaincy services, and uses this to promote and develop effective, evidence-based practice.</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature on religious care and practice; • Literature on equality and diversity; • Key government and local policies, standards and guidelines; • Pathways and assessments used in spiritual and religious care; • Models of reflection and experiential learning; • Self-awareness; • Evidenced based practice; • Understanding spirituality in the context of health and social care; • Policy development; • Understanding/exploring own spirituality – beliefs, values, world view; • Rituals within different faith and cultures from sociological, anthropological, psychological and theological perspectives; • The Chaplain / Service-user relationship; • Empathy and respect in the context of health and social care; • Theories of grief, loss and bereavement; • Psychological concepts e.g. transference and countertransference; • Impact of social class/deprivation on the ability to access services, including spiritual care 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
1.1.1	Recognise the forms in which spiritual need manifests itself in individuals.	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will be able to build and sustain close relationships with those in spiritual need. They will always model safe, effective, person-centred care in various contexts including where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cause to celebrate; • need to impart hope; • need to preserve dignity; • need for forgiveness; • need to listen to questions and explore answers; • a search for meaning; • need to resolve unfinished business
1.1.2	Recognise the forms in which religious and cultural needs manifest themselves in individuals	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will be able to show empathy and identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requirements for privacy; • dietary requirements; • issues of gender; • healthcare interventions; • religious requirements in the event of significant events such as birth and death.

1.1.3	Discern, assess and meet the needs of individuals displaying unhelpful manifestations of spirituality or religion.	Primary Care Chaplains will be intuitive, empathic and able to critique different types of evidence.
1.1.4	Maintain a knowledge and understanding of the main world faiths and belief groups, with particular reference to their philosophies, beliefs and practices around illness, birth, dying and death.	Primary Care Chaplains will be outward looking and actively engaged with other ways of being.
1.1.5	Maintain the processes and protocols by which referrals are made to and from the chaplaincy service, and monitor these for effectiveness.	Primary Care Chaplains will actively evaluate their own effectiveness in a systematic and replicable manner.
1.1.6	Maintain appropriate documentation of referrals, assessment, interventions and outcomes.	Primary Care Chaplains will be structured and organized, keeping records in line with local policy.
1.1.7	Prioritise demands on time and attention and follow the protocol for such prioritisation.	Primary Care Chaplains will be able to make emergency referrals; routine referrals; follow-up visits.
1.1.8	Apply relevant local and national policies or guidelines and collaborate with other members of the chaplaincy and healthcare teams to incorporate these into practice.	Primary Care Chaplains will be able to facilitate the co-production and implementation of relevant local and national policies or guidelines.
1.1.9	Use knowledge of professional and legal accountability and responsibility to ensure safe and effective practice that meets the needs of individuals using the spiritual care service.	Primary Care Chaplains will be able to apply this knowledge in different contexts including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marriage, funerals, advance directives; • child protection, vulnerable adults; • working with volunteers.
1.1.10	Recognise his or her personal role and responsibility in ensuring compliance with all relevant regulations and requirements for safe and effective working.	Primary Care Chaplains will, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure compliance with health and safety regulations; • ensure compliance with GDPR and other relevant confidentiality policy; • maintain administrative records and reports in accordance with local protocols.
1.1.11	Evaluate and apply relevant research findings and in collaboration with other members of the chaplaincy and healthcare teams incorporate them into practice.	Primary Care Chaplains will ensure the effective interpretation and implementation of research findings and recommendation within spiritual care departments and healthcare teams.
1.1.12	Contribute to audit and research within spiritual care practice.	Primary Care Chaplains will proactively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess spiritual care standards; • audit own use of time; • conduct pilot studies; • participate in a local or national research project.

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Element 1.2 Practising ethically	<p>Practising ethically: Primary Care Chaplains maintain and develop their knowledge of culture, diversity, ethical, professional and legal theory and frameworks. This knowledge is used to support everyone accessing spiritual care services.</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional code of conduct; • Literature on ethical theory; • Literature on ethical issues, e.g. informed consent, decision making, culture and diversity, duty of care, ethics and legalities; • Develop knowledge and understanding of Chaplain's own faith/belief and culture; • How is spirituality understood within different cultures/belief systems; and: • Ethical principles; • Unconscious bias; • Professionalism; • Legal issues; • The use and abuse of power; • Empowering others. 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
1.2.1	Understand and apply the ethical principles	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a non-maleficence (do no harm) attitude; • be beneficent (seek well-being); • respect autonomy; • be just.
1.2.2	Differentiate personal beliefs, morals and values from healthcare ethics.	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise that a variety of value systems, customs, beliefs and practices will co-exist within healthcare ethics.
1.2.3	Provide an ethical, theological, pastoral and spiritual care resource to engage with individuals and the institution.	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support individuals who are experiencing faith/belief and ethical dilemmas in their situations; • reflect on and evaluate the ethical information provided for patients, family/carers and staff; • contribute to ethical discussion, committees, and forums within field of practice; • inform on the ethical implications of changes in buildings, local priorities and working practices.

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Element 1.3 Communication skills	Communication skills: Primary Care Chaplains maintain and develop the communication skills necessary for the spiritual and religious care of service users and in promotion of the service. Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills theory; • Communication skills education and training; • Literature on counselling, pastoral care, spiritual care or listening skills; • Advanced communication skills; • Having difficult conversations; • How spiritual need is articulated; • Communication with service users; • Communication with the multidisciplinary team; 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
1.3.1	Use communication skills to provide spiritual care to individuals.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apply different communication techniques including, active listening empathy, use of silence, open questioning, reflection; • be aware of barriers to effective communication including: false assurance; leading questions changing the focus; defending colleagues; • apply counselling skills including: congruence, empathy, unconditional positive regard.
1.3.2	Identify language needs and access interpreting services	Primary Care Chaplains will: be intuitive and resourceful.
1.3.3	Contribute to inter-professional communication.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use verbal and written communication skills to share and record information within the healthcare team and with other professionals; • articulate need accurately on behalf of an individual.
1.3.4	Maintain confidentiality and obtain informed consent.	Considering GDPR, Primary Care Chaplains will identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what information has been disclosed only to the chaplain in confidence? • what information has a focus in patient care and should (with the patient's permission) be recorded for the healthcare team? • what information needs to be shared with the wider healthcare team because it has implications for the immediate safety of the patient from self-harm or the immediate safety of others from being harmed by the individual? • what information needs to be shared under the relevant child protection or vulnerable adults' legislation?
1.3.5	Communicate with individuals in a variety of complex spiritual care encounters.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • converse with individuals during traumatic events; • break bad news in an empathetic manner; • handle difficult questions, strong emotions, and collusion

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Element 1.4 Education and training	<p>Education and training: Primary Care Chaplains contribute to and deliver education consistent with the needs of the service.</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual Care Policies; • Education in communication skills; • Develop education to improve/increase understanding of the role of the chaplain in healthcare; • Supporting and mentoring; • Empowering others. 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
1.4.1	Observe the contribution of Chaplains to education and training programmes.	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observe the contribution of their colleagues to educational and training programmes, with a view to developing their own practice in this area of work.
1.4.2	Contribute to the organisation's induction programme for new staff	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduce new staff to the role of the chaplain; • introduce new staff to spiritual care services.
1.4.3	Present education and training sessions to a variety of internal groups.	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contribute to the organisation's education and training programmes
1.4.4	Present education and training to external voluntary and healthcare groups.	<p>Primary Care Chaplains will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organise talks/seminars with faith communities, voluntary groups or healthcare groups on spiritual care services and the role of the Primary Care Chaplains.

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Element 1.5 Leadership, Management, Organisation and Service Development	<p>Leadership, Management, Organisation and Service Development: Primary Care Chaplains are all expected to demonstrate leadership and management consistent with their role and responsibility and the needs of the service. (Leadership is seen here as something distinct from Management. While some chaplains will have management responsibilities, all chaplains will lead by word and example in this area of Spiritual Care, in order to promote the values and beliefs that are at the centre of high-quality healthcare).</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Health Department policies and guidelines; • Reports and research related to spiritual and religious care in healthcare and bereavement etc; • Organisational culture; • Styles of leadership and management; • Decision making; • Conflict resolution; • Change management. 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
1.5.1	Focus on influencing and leading a positive culture in the context of care.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • model values and behaviours in teams and workplace
1.5.2	Work to influence positive changes in the context of care	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable the development of plans and strategy, and model values and behaviours in teams and workplace
1.5.3	Use role authority appropriately when delivering spiritual care	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in the context of an emergency situation, lead staff and service users in the delivery of spiritual care • hold and lead communal space in the context of, for example, a memorial service for a colleague, or a funeral.

Domain 2 Spiritual Care Practice

Domain 2	Spiritual Care Practice	
Element 2.1 Spiritual assessment	<p>Spiritual assessment: Primary Care Chaplain assess the core values and beliefs that resource the service users and responds in ways which can include referral and signposting to other care providers. This encompasses pastoral, spiritual and religious assessments.</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature relating to needs, especially spiritual needs; • Knowledge of internal and external sources of spiritual support; • Local and national directory of sources of spiritual support; • Develop knowledge and understanding of different faiths/cultures; • How is spirituality understood within different cultures/belief systems; and • History taking and assessing need; • Multi agency working; • Multidisciplinary working; • Emotional intelligence; • Empowering others; • Assessing and understanding carers needs. 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
2.1.1	Assess the spiritual needs and resources of individuals	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore the individual's sense of meaning and purpose in life; their attitudes, beliefs, ideas, values and concerns around ill-health, life, and death; • use evidence-based tools such as the Patient Reported Outcome Measure (PROM) to help assess individual problems
2.1.2	Respond to assessed spiritual needs with spiritual care	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let the person talk about what is on their mind. • affirm life and worth by encouraging reminiscing and narrative; • explore the individual's hopes and fears regarding the present and future; • explore existential questions relating to life, death, illness and suffering
2.1.3	Assess and respect the experience and expression of an individual's spiritual well-being without necessarily endorsing the beliefs, religious or otherwise, and their observance, held by the individual.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act at all times in a non-judgmental and respectful manner
2.1.4	Facilitate an inclusive reflective setting that is appropriate to a diversity of faith and belief communities.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible use or create a quiet, calm, private space
2.1.5	Facilitate referral, with the individual's permission, to other sources of spiritual care.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to other members of the healthcare team or external resources.

2.1.6	Act as an advocate for service-users.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as advocate where required, for example when the service-user requests our help in asking faith and belief community representatives not to visit
2.1.7	Record spiritual assessments and interventions in the patient information systems	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • always maintain records systematically. • use evidence-based assessment tools.
2.1.8	Develop methods and procedures for spiritual assessment for use by the healthcare team and spiritual care team.	Primary Care Chaplains will model the use of structured assessment for colleagues and disseminate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when and by whom spiritual assessment will take place; • the format of any assessment tool; • guidelines for the use of any assessment tool; • guidelines on when and how to refer.
2.1.9	Explore the core values and beliefs of a service-user with a view to assessing and meeting pastoral, spiritual and religious needs.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply asset-based listening in order to help the individual make the necessary connections between core values and beliefs, recovery and wellbeing and good decision-making

Professional practice Organisational Practice

Domain 3	Organisational Practice	
Element 3.1 Team working	<p>Team working: The Primary Care Chaplain works in an integrated way with other health and social care teams</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of local spiritual care team, multidisciplinary teams and the wider healthcare team; • Knowledge of teams, groups and team building; • Understanding of communication within teams and team dynamics; • Communication skills; • Teams and how they work; • Multi agency working; • Multidisciplinary working; • Health and social care integration 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
3.1.1	Practice within the agreed protocols and procedures of the local spiritual care team and the General Practice or unit where the chaplain works.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work within local governance in relation to assessment, referral, visiting regulations, confidentiality, advocacy, hygiene standards, health and safety.
3.1.2	Identify and contribute to the healthcare teams in the General Practice or unit.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive and respond to referrals from members of the healthcare team; • Contribute to multidisciplinary teams • Recognise the role and skills of other members of the healthcare team and refer. • Be available to support healthcare colleagues where needed.
3.1.3	Understand the dynamics within teams.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be available with mediation skills to support healthcare colleagues

Domain 3	Organisational Practice	
Element 3.2 Staff support	<p>Staff support: Primary Care Chaplains build working relationships with members of staff and volunteers and responds to requests for personal and professional support. The chaplain intentionally supports members of staff through spiritual and pastoral care.</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the spiritual needs of healthcare professionals; • Knowledge of workplace stress and personal stress; • Literature on provision of staff support, spiritual and religious care, or counselling skills; • Models of reflection and experiential learning; • Facilitate Reflective Practice for staff • Communication skills; • Problem solving; • Grief loss and bereavement. 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
3.2.1	Build working relationships with staff, volunteers, and groups	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be available. • build networks and relationships with staff through regular contact
3.2.2	Respect confidence in responding to requests for personal support from members of staff and volunteers	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be discrete, trustworthy and respect confidence
3.2.3	Recognise his or her own personal skills and limitations in providing personal and professional support.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure personal development in ongoing.
3.2.4	Respond to requests for professional support from members of staff and volunteers.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be a resource for staff in the areas of ethics and spiritual care. • create safe and secure space for staff to talk about the things that matter most to them.
3.2.5	Identify other sources of internal or external staff support and, with the staff member's permission, facilitate referral.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain external connections with a range of community support groups in order to better support the needs of a range of different people.
3.2.6	Respond to requests for professional support from members of staff and volunteers in regard to complex matters.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide advice on and understanding of complex spiritual and religious care or ethical issues; • advice on how to support patients, their family/carers or colleagues in complex scenarios. • attend and engage with multidisciplinary team meetings, offering advice within their range of competence • maintain good time management with, where possible, space and flexibility in the working week

Domain 3	Organisational Practice	
Element 3.3 Chaplain to the organisation	<p>Chaplain to the organisation: Primary Care Chaplains are aware of their role in major incidents affecting the organisation and respond to staff issues and events that need a communal recognition and action.</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and national policy and procedure for significant events; • Literature on acts of remembrance; • Literature on significant events and their impact on individuals and groups; • Understanding policy; • Organisational culture; • Facilitate corporate events as required by the organisation • 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
3.3.1	Respond to the spiritual care service policy and procedures when a major incident has been declared.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • act in accordance with local policy.
3.3.2	Respond to unplanned events, external or internal, which have an effect on the Practice or unit, utilising internal and external resources, such as death of a member of staff, national disasters, world events, remembrance and anniversaries	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be there. • listen to people. • respond appropriately to discerned staff and organisational need.
3.3.3	Create and lead corporate reflective acts which have spiritual significance, such as acts of remembrance, celebration of anniversaries of institutions, formal opening of new areas of healthcare	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an ability to hold the space at such events through appropriate role authority.
3.3.4	Provide a spiritual perspective for the Practice or unit, such as championing privacy and dignity issues; raising issues of morale and other staff themes with senior management.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • act as advocate for those with no or little voice.

Domain 4 Reflective Practice

Domain 4	Reflective Practice	
Element 4.1 Professional Learning and Development Based on Supervision and Reflection on Work	<p>Professional Learning and Development Based on Supervision and Reflection on Work: As part of the process of continuing professional development the Primary Care Chaplain demonstrates the ability to reflect upon practice in order to develop and inform their professional practice.</p> <p>Primary Care Chaplains will demonstrate awareness of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods and models of reflective practice; • Professionalism and boundaries; • Developing self-awareness and practice; • Models of reflection and experiential learning; • Values based reflective practice; • Self-awareness. 	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
4.1.1	Be able to use different models of reflective practice.	Primary Care Chaplains will be able to use models of reflective practice such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clinical pastoral education • pastoral reflective practice • values based reflective practice • case study reflective practice
4.1.2	Be able to use a structured method of reflective practice to reflect on and discuss issues arising from practice	Primary Care Chaplains will be able to discuss one or more of these issues during clinical supervision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managing the pressures of caseload; • reconciling personal spirituality with the varied needs and beliefs of others; • the changing nature of his or her work through growth in pastoral and spiritual care practice and theological reflection; • how belief systems and practice inter-relate.
4.1.3	Use a structured method of reflective practice to reflect on and discuss professional relationships	Primary Care Chaplains will commit to life-long learning and continued personal and professional development with the ability to discuss the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • his or her own values and beliefs and how they may affect attitudes and behaviour to individuals using the spiritual care service; • personal and professional boundaries and the boundaries that come with developing a professional relationship with an individual; • reconciling personal spirituality with the varied needs and beliefs of others; • professional relationships and integrity when building relationships with people at vulnerable times in their lives
4.1.4	Discuss the limits of his or her own abilities and competences in order to develop practice.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage in clinical supervision and a values-based model of reflective practice
4.1.5	Facilitate reflective practice for others such as volunteers; staff from other disciplines; peer review; significant event analysis.	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • model engaging in regular supervision

Domain 4	Reflective Practice	
Element 4.2 Personal Spiritual Development	Personal Spiritual Development: Primary Care Chaplains reflect theologically or philosophically on his or her professional practice.	
Competence	Skills	Behaviour
4.2.1	Keep informed of developments in theological or philosophical literature and research relevant to their practice as chaplain	Primary Care Chaplains will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be familiar with current theological or philosophical journals; • keep an open dialogue with chaplains, and others, of a different background and tradition; • be familiar with the use of imagination and the creative arts.
4.2.2	Integrate personal beliefs and external experiences	Primary Care Chaplains will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain an up-to-date knowledge understanding and experience of their own faith community or belief group; • practise appropriate spiritual discipline in accordance with their own tradition
4.2.3	Acknowledge the limits of engagement with people and the need for emotional self-care.	Primary Care Chaplains will have an awareness of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • handling stress, • compassion-fatigue • burnout.

The above is mainly adapted from the UK Board of Healthcare Chaplaincy [Spiritual Care Competences for Healthcare Chaplains \(2020\)](#). Domain 4 Element 4.2 is adapted from 'Spiritual and Religious Care Capabilities and Competences for Healthcare Chaplains Bands (or Levels) 5, 6, 7 & 8 (2017)'

E R Bryson, Association of Chaplaincy in General Practice. November 2021

References

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[UKBHC Code of Conduct](#)

[UKBHC Spiritual and Religious Care Capabilities and Competences for Healthcare Chaplains Bands \(or Levels\) 5, 6, 7 & 8 \(2017\)](#)

[UKBHC Spiritual Care Competences for Healthcare Chaplains \(2020\)](#)