IS EXERCISE THE ELIXIR OF YOUTH?

Early one morning about eight years ago, my mom, then just shy of 90, stood at the door of my home office and said that her left arm hurt between her shoulder and elbow. Scared she was having heart problems, I called our family doctor, who sent Mom for a full day of cardiac testing. One test required her to walk on a treadmill. The staff hovered, worried that she’d lose her balance and tumble off. The attention was unwarranted. She easily kept up and even had enough breath to inform her attendants: “You know, I work out with a personal trainer every week.” She still does.

Mom has always valued exercise, and I’m convinced — along with her doctors, who are backed by a strong body of research — that her longtime fitness habit has slowed her decline and kept her in generally good health. (That pain in her arm turned out to be nothing.)

Exercise is “the best medicine no one wants to do,” says Ronan Factora, a gerontologist at the Cleveland Clinic. Even tiny bites of fitness bring big rewards. A 2011 study that aimed to figure out whether a low level of exercise could bring health benefits showed that even 15 minutes of walking a day can add three to five years of life.

“I tell my elderly patients that it doesn’t take very much exercise to benefit them,” Factora says. “We’re not talking about breaking a sweat. I’m not asking you to run a marathon. I’m just asking you to get up and move.”

People at any age benefit from exercise, he says, and the frailest residents in nursing homes benefit the most.

Exercise helps keeps aging bodies healthy by increasing blood flow to the brain, carrying extra oxygen and other nutrients. It also helps keep blood pressure and blood sugar at normal levels, lowering the risk for vascular dementia, Factora says.

Exercise can also lower risk for dementia by keeping the hippocampus — the place in the brain where we make and store memories — a healthy size, according to some research. As we age, the hippocampus shrinks, raising our risk for dementia. In a study published in 2010, researchers tested aerobic exercise on 120 healthy adults. After one year, the hippocampus increased in volume by 2 percent in the group participating in aerobic exercise — “effectively reversing age-related loss in volume” by one to two years, according to the researchers. The volume declined in control-group, members, who were not asked to do aerobic training.

Even frail people with dementia benefit from exercise. According to a new review by the Cochrane Collaboration, eight clinical trials found that people with dementia who exercised improved their performance.
on tests used to evaluate memory loss. The reviewers expressed cautious optimism about the results, noting that there were differences in results from individual trials and that there was not enough evidence to show that exercise improves symptoms of depression. “Nevertheless, these are encouraging results, as dementia is a debilitating disease that results in progressive decline in cognition and ability to perform” daily activities.

Frailty itself should not keep those with cognitive impairment out of the gym. Researchers at the University of Heidelberg showed recently that people with dementia can be taught to use exercise machines and that the exercise done by people in this group can indeed be rigorous. And these workouts can help them both physically and mentally.

Everyone has limits, and it’s always best to start slowly, but “move from zero to something,” Factora says. He suggests having someone such as a physical therapist help monitor progress at first. Then move to a personal trainer and exercise on a regular schedule.

Mowing the lawn in her 70s

For my mom, exercise hasn’t always meant the gym. When my sisters and I were young and playing in the yard, she’d always race us to the back door. She kept fit in part by cutting the grass in our large yard, a practice she continued throughout her 70s. “I’ve been doing this my whole life,” Mom says. “I used to be a secretary and I sat at a desk five days a week, so I always felt like I wanted to get up and move.”

After Mom was widowed 13 years ago, she moved in with my husband and me. To help with her social life and keep her osteoarthritis at bay, I signed her up for an aerobics class that we took together. She and the instructor hit it off so well that I signed Mom up for weekly private workouts with her.

From the start, the trainer put Mom, then 85, through a challenging, hour-long program that works every major muscle group. Today, Mom’s left knee is bone on bone — end-stage joint disease. She walks in pain every day, and some days are worse than others. But she goes to the gym anyway, climbing the stairs to the weight room even on really achy days.

Mom warms up on a recumbent exercise bike for about eight minutes. Then her trainer starts her on a circuit of resistance machines and free weights. Mom works her abs by sitting on a bench and doing crunches by lifting her knees to her chest. She stays on the same bench and works her legs by repeated standing and sitting. Then, she uses two-pound free weights for her biceps and shoulders. She’ll do some push-ups against the wall before moving to the equipment for more upper- and lower-body work.

She and her trainer finish up on the mat with a few more abs, and they end with some stretches. If Mom’s knee is really bad, they’ll skip the mat and finish with abs and stretches with Mom sitting on a bench. By then, her hour is up. Her doctor is amazed and delighted that she continues this routine, and tells her that he wishes all of his patients were that active.

Years ago, after Mom and her trainer had been working together for a few months, the trainer had Mom on a mat and said to me, “Hey, come here and your feel your mom’s abs.” They were rock-hard.

‘The exercise talk’

Mom hasn’t always had it easy. She survived two bouts with breast cancer. When she was 74, she broke her first bone — her right wrist — when, as usual, she was moving too fast and slipped on the basement floor. At the time I was working as a bone researcher at what used to be Jewish Hospital in St. Louis. Every Friday morning, we had a department-wide bone conference. Not long after Mom broke her wrist, Stanley Birge, a gerontologist at Washington University School of Medicine, spoke about exercise and falls in the elderly.
Afterward, I signed Mom up for one of his clinical trials on exercise and aging. During one of the office visits when Birge was taking Mom's family history, she complained to him that I wouldn't let her use the StairMaster in her basement unless I was there to supervise. Birge called me, and we had "the exercise talk." He said that Mom's spine was so riddled with osteoarthritis that it would "snap like a rusty hinge" if she didn't keep those muscles strong. He also told me to let Mom use the StairMaster because "we can't keep our parents in glass houses."

After that, I let Mom use the StairMaster whenever she wanted, and I added some exercises to strengthen muscles in her upper back.

In 2007, Mom fell while running to answer the phone. Her left side hit the slate floor in our entryway, and she broke her left arm right below the shoulder. Once the break healed, Mom could barely raise that arm. The orthopedic surgeon sent her to physical therapy for eight visits, saying that she'd never regain her mobility. The therapist worked Mom's shoulder in much the same way as her trainer, using weights and resistance training and a lot of stretching. After four visits, you'd never have known that shoulder was broken. The therapist called the doctor and canceled the rest of the visits, saying we'd be wasting our money if we continued with therapy.

As caregivers know, tending to aging parents takes its toll, even if the person you're caring for is someone as wonderful as my mother. Three years ago, I began to think I really I couldn't do it anymore and visited some residential-care facilities.

The places were nice, and the residents looked clean and well tended. But not one facility I visited had an exercise room. David Schless, president of the American Seniors Housing Association, assures me that the places I visited are the exception. "Starting about 10 to 15 years ago, it's become much more common to include gyms in senior housing facilities," he says.

Ultimately, I decided to keep Mom with us. She was 95 years old then, and I don't think she would have lived to 98 had she moved into a residential facility.

Here's what the years of working out with Mom have taught me: We greatly underestimate the sheer physical strength we're capable of achieving at any age. A few weeks ago at the gym, I filmed my mom doing her second set of leg curls. I counted along, and at 10 reps, thinking she was done, I said, "That's 10, Mom!" Her trainer corrected me: "She does 15." (Contributor: By Jeanne Erdmann for The Washington Post - Erdmann is a freelance health and science writer based in Wentzville, Mo.)

You're never too old to exercise. A 98-year-old show us why. VIDEO LINK

This is a good reminder for seniors to stay as active and healthy as long as they can, including a proper diet and whatever exercising they are able to maintain. And for younger people, who may think "old age" is many years away, it could be a wake-up call to get started on a healthier regimen as a form of "prevention insurance" to help ward off the early debilitations that we all will face in later years. Perhaps it is also a good reminder that "it's never too late to start," as we review our eating choices and exercise options. While we cannot (nor do Christians wish to) adjust God's will and purpose for our lives, including the fact that “our times are in (His) hands” and that the number of our days is written in God's record book, still we can cooperate with God to remain as healthy and active in His service for as long as possible while continuing our journey toward a bright eternity with Him.

"But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand; Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies’ sake. Oh, how great is Your goodness,
which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You…”
(Psalms 31:15-16, 19)

“You eyes saw my unformed substance, and in Your book all the days [of my life] were written before ever they took shape, when as yet there was none of them.” (Psalm 139:16, Amplified)

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

AFTER SENATE BUDGET VOTE, FEW HOPES FOR A PRODUCTIVE 2014

The bipartisan budget compromise that passed the House by a wide margin last week has inspired House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) to blast outside conservative groups that he said were using Republican members of Congress for their own gain. It has inspired kind words between the two legislators — Senate Budget Committee Chairman Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) — who hammered out the deal. And it has inspired hope that, after years of governing by crisis, Congress may begin returning to something resembling regular order.

But that hope masks a deeply divided Senate, where ill will over recent rule changes has heightened a bitter partisan divide. As the Senate prepares to take up the budget deal this week, both sides say it is likely to be one of the final pieces of significant legislation to pass the 113th Congress as midterm elections loom.

Even the deal’s chief Democratic negotiator conceded Sunday that her relationship with Ryan is no sign of things to come.

“I think the grand bargain, you know, that puts everything in a whole lot of tough votes on the table is impossible to find at this point,” Murray said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Despite the broad bipartisan vote to pass the budget deal in the House, Democrats are still trying to come up with the 60 votes necessary to break a GOP-led filibuster in the Senate. On Friday, several key Republicans signaled that they would vote to end debate. That list included Sens. John McCain (Ariz), Jeff Flake (Ariz.), Susan Collins (Maine) and Richard Burr (N.C.). Several others, including Sens. Johnny Isakson (Ga.), Saxby Chambliss (Ga.), Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) and Bob Corker (Tenn.), have indicated that they may vote for cloture. McCain said Sunday he would support the final measure.

“The struggle is still on in the United States Senate; we will need about eight Republicans to come our way. I feel we’ll have a good, strong showing from the Democratic side. But we need bipartisan support to pass it,” Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) said on CBS’s “Face the Nation.”

The Senate is expected to vote to end debate Tuesday morning, followed by a vote on final passage by Wednesday evening. The chamber is scheduled to end its legislative business for the year on Friday, though aides in both parties suggested that it may adjourn Wednesday or Thursday.

After the Senate reconvenes in January, observers say, the coming year is unlikely to yield significant legislative action. Democrats will probably advance measures intended to draw political contrasts with Republicans — including a proposal to raise the minimum wage and a number of smaller bills that they say would boost jobs and strengthen the economy. None of those measures are likely to win Republican votes or spur action in the GOP-controlled House.
“Senate Democrats have the opportunity over the next year to work with us to make job creation easier rather than pushing job-killing tax hikes; they have the opportunity to work with us to protect consumers from the consequences of Obamacare; and they have the opportunity to undo the damage they’ve done to the legislative process. Sadly, all signs point to more of the same political legislation designed to fail,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said in a statement. “The American people have given us divided government. The administration needs to accept it.”

Congress won’t be completely dormant: House and Senate negotiators are nearing a final deal on the farm bill, and the two chambers are working on a -water-resources agreement. Democratic and Republican negotiators will also have to strike a deal to raise the debt ceiling, probably by mid-February.

Immigration reform, a major priority for President Obama, is stuck in the House; Boehner has said the chamber won’t take up the Senate-passed version of the legislation.

The Senate is likely to take action on a proposal from Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) to make changes to the military’s handling of sexual assault cases, and to consider a new package of sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

But in an election year in the sixth year of a presidency, there is little precedent for major bipartisan agreements. John Pitney, a political scientist at Claremont McKenna College and a former top staffer at the Republican National Committee, pointed to a tax reform bill that passed in 1986. But Congress had been working on that measure for months, and there is no such significant deal being discussed on Capitol Hill today.

"Even aside from increased partisan polarization, it is hard to see how lawmakers could pull off anything comparable in the remaining months of the 113th Congress," Pitney said.

And while Ryan and Murray have been highly complimentary of each other, relations between the parties in the Senate have been rubbed raw by a package of filibuster rule changes that Democrats forced through the chamber last month.

The Ryan-Murray compromise “is not a sea change in terms of how the bodies work,” said Jeff Bjornstad, a lobbyist and former Murray chief of staff. “The dynamics of the filibuster change will just reentrench the small ball.” (Contributor: By Reid Wilson for The Washington Post - Paul Kane and Ed O’Keefe contributed to this report.)

Greetings, intercessors, and welcome to a new year of challenge and prayer with IFA. It is a privilege for us to serve our many readers with up-to-date, weekly prayer alerts that carry biblical foundations. Even with Congress out on end-of-year vacation, our primary prayer focus today can only be for unity in a nation seriously and severely divided. Let us agree in prayer: “Father God, we are called ‘The UNITED States’ but are divided at so many levels. We face growing division nationally, politically, socially, economically, and spiritually. We are divided on such basic matters as to whether our Constitution is still valid for guidance and balance in the 21st century. Despite a bloody Civil War and civil rights laws, we are still divided racially. Our country needs a new moral pathway. We who understand repentance want to repent for our many national sins. We pray, in this election year, that Your Church will find unity of purpose in prayer and in voting carefully and prayerfully to raise up morally upright leaders who truly want ‘liberty and justice for all.’ But even beyond the ballot box, we know ‘salvation’ and ‘restoration’ cannot come from Washington, DC. Our nation needs a wellspring of revival to sweep the country with Your transforming power. Please hear us and come to our aid. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church and coming Prince of Peace. Amen!”
“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34)

“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.” (Matthew 12:25)

**KATIE FALLON IS NAMED NEW LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS DIRECTOR**

With congressional elections looming next year, President Barack Obama named a veteran Democratic operative as his new chief liaison to Capitol Hill on Friday, following a long period of bitter partisan fights.

Deputy communications director Katie Fallon, formerly a senior Senate aide, will take over as legislative affairs director in January. She will replace Miguel Rodriguez, a former aide to Hillary Rodham Clinton, who says he is leaving to work in the private sector.

The change is a recognition that the White House needs to improve relations with lawmakers, after bruising battles over health care and the budget. Congressional Democrats are concerned that the troubled rollout of Obama's health care law could impact their chances in the 2014 midterms. Obama needs the lawmakers' help to get any of his agenda passed, after few accomplishments the first year of his second term.

With polls showing a majority of Americans disapprove of the way Obama is handling his job, outsiders have been calling on the president to make changes to a team made up largely of long-time confidants. Obama is bringing back his legislative director from his first term, Phil Schiliro, to help get his health care overhaul on track.

The most significant staff change was announced earlier this week, when the White House said prominent Democratic adviser John Podesta would be taking on the role of counselor to the president, replacing longtime Obama aide Pete Rouse. Additionally, White House counsel Kathryn Ruemmler has announced she plans to leave in the spring, and other White House staffers may depart in the coming weeks. The rest of the senior staff is expected to stay largely intact.

White House chief of staff Denis McDonough has been leading an effort to repair relationships with lawmakers, including regular meetings with senators facing re-election. The White House said McDonough wanted to restructure the legislative affairs office to be more responsive to lawmaker concerns and better promote Obama's agenda, and proposed to the president that Fallon take on the task.

"Katie is whip smart, and fully understands the challenges and opportunities members of Congress face every day," McDonough said in a statement.

The White House said Obama and Fallon met recently to discuss challenges with the Hill and come up with a plan for addressing them, including strategy around stalled immigration reform and communication about the health care law's implementation.

Fallon has been deeply involved in the White House's public response to the health law's problems, creating "strike force" communications teams of Democrats from the House and Senate to coordinate the message of the day. She is a protégé of New York Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer and helped run his communications "war room" for the Senate Democratic leadership before she moved to the White House earlier this year.

Obama announced Fallon's new position in a written statement. "She has the deep expertise and strong relationships required to build on the progress we've made this year and advance my top priority: creating
jobs and expanding broad-based growth and opportunity for every American," it said. (Contributor: The Associated Press and NPR)

Political restructuring and infighting are endemic to a divided nation, especially as 2014 is an election year. Again, disunity is rampant at every level. Both major parties are divided, and President Obama's allies in Congress are seriously concerned about his very low approval ratings (meaning very high disapproval ratings!). Please continue to pray, and invite other intercessors to join you and perhaps your prayer group, that we might together ask God, humbly and sincerely, to bring salvation to the White House and to the halls of Congress. Even though we know there are many men and women, people with strong Christian faith, who serve on Capitol Hill and in the Administrative Branch, we pray for direct penetration of the Gospel, by the work and power of the Holy Spirit, to confront the highest levels and branches of U.S. government power, for the glory of God and the salvation of many. Let us agree that our primary pleas for unity must begin with the Church, which itself needs healing and revival to be a source of spiritual prayer power for our country.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing—Life forevermore." (Psalm 133)

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all...." (1 Timothy 2:1-6a)

EXTREMIST SYRIAN FACTION TOUTS TRAINING CAMP FOR BOYS

At first glance, the training camp appears no different from the many others shown in propaganda videos posted by al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria. Hooded recruits in camouflage shoot at targets or march in formation under the black flag of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

But look closer and the “fighters” appear quite small. The tallest are barely chest-high to their instructors, and the shorter ones wear ill-fitting uniforms and appear to struggle under the weight of their weapons. A photo of the recruits without their hoods confirms that all of them are young boys.

They are “Zarqawi’s Cubs,” the youth brigade of Syria’s most fearsome Islamist rebel group and one of the newest manifestations of al-Qaeda’s deepening roots in rebel-controlled sections of the country. Building on earlier efforts to expand their influence in Syrian schools, radical Islamists appear to be stepping up efforts to indoctrinate and train children, some as young as 10, according to independent experts who have studied the phenomenon.

The establishment of the Zarqawi’s Cubs camp — revealed in a video posted last month by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS — is viewed as particularly worrisome because of the similarities to Iraq’s “Birds of Paradise.” That brigade was created a decade ago by the same terrorist group, in its earlier incarnation as al-Qaeda in Iraq, to train children for military missions, including suicide bombings.
“This is the future threat,” said Steven Stalinsky, executive director of the Middle East Media Research Institute, a Washington nonprofit organization that has tracked the exploitation of children by Syrian fighting groups over the past two years. “These are the children of al-Qaeda.”

U.N. agencies and human rights groups have accused multiple Syrian factions — including secularist rebels and pro-government militias — of recruiting children for military roles ranging from scouting to actual combat.

Researchers from Human Rights Watch interviewed boys as young as 14 who were used to transport weapons or serve as lookouts. Even younger children were put to work loading bullets into magazines for assault rifles, said Sarah Margon, acting director of the group’s Washington office.

“It’s something that children often do because their fingers are smaller,” Margon said. But such practical considerations aside, “for those looking to indoctrinate, it is a ripe setting for indoctrination,” she added.

The Obama administration last year imposed restrictions on some of its nonmilitary aid to Syria in part because of concerns about the use of child soldiers. Invoking a 2008 law forbidding assistance to countries that use child soldiers, the administration approved restrictions on certain types of nonmilitary aid to Syria as well as the Central African Republic, Burma, Sudan and six other countries, according to State Department documents.

The appearance of training camps for young boys suggests a more systematic effort to incorporate the youngest Syrians into the conflict, as ideological supporters and as combatants in a religious war against a regime led by the country’s minority Alawites, members of an offshoot of the Shiite branch of Islam, according to experts who study jihadist groups.

Radical groups often post images on social media that highlight the role played by children, and some attempt to tailor their messages to appeal to the very young, said Aaron Zelin, an expert on jihadist groups at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

“They understand that they are the future and, therefore, need to be exposed and indoctrinated to the ‘cause,’ ” Zelin said. It explains why some groups operate age-based training camps that start with “cubs” and progress to “lion scouts” for older teens and adults, he said.

The ISIS youth group was named in honor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian who founded al-Qaeda in Iraq, a group notorious for its spectacular suicide bombings targeting Shiite mosques and bazaars in Iraq’s Shiite neighborhoods, as well as its videotaped beheadings of Western hostages. Zarqawi, killed in a U.S. airstrike in 2006, remains an inspirational figure for Islamist extremists worldwide, as well as the ideological father of ISIS and other al-Qaeda-allied rebel groups in Syria, including Jabhat al-Nusra.

The video depicting the Zarqawi’s Cubs camp describes the location of the facility as near Ghouta, the same eastern suburb of Damascus that was struck in a chemical-weapons attack in August that killed more than 1,000 civilians. Much of the region has been held by rebels for months, despite intense fighting in some villages.

The boys are shown being led by masked instructors through small-arms exercises and sitting in groups under the ISIS banner, some of them weighed down by bandoleers of machine-gun ammunition. Other images show the boys undergoing instruction or, in one instance, talking happily over a lunch of flatbread. Beverages are distributed in colorful cups adorned with the cartoon “happy face.”

In the soundtrack, Arab voices sing a mournful song. “Oh mother, don’t be saddened by my leaving,” it says at one point, explaining that the boys are going away to fight “for the sake of defeating the Jews.”
Experts who viewed the video said it appeared authentic, though precisely when and where the images were recorded could not be established with certainty. Nor is it clear how many children are being trained.

Others who have tracked the recruitment of children by Syrian militant factions see the latest initiatives as intended mainly to indoctrinate young Syrians raised in a country that has a long tradition of secularist rule. The emergence of training camps for youths comes on the heels of school-outreach programs by both ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, which control swaths of northern and eastern Syria. Both organizations have posted videos on Twitter and YouTube showing visits to Syrian classrooms by armed militants, who hand out Islamic textbooks, as well as food and gifts.

Another self-identified ISIS video, posted in late November, shows a man in conservative Arab dress leading several dozen children in Syria’s Aleppo province in denouncing a list of “infidels,” including Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and President Obama.

“Imagine we had here with us an Alawite, from al-Assad’s family or religion. Would we like him?” asked the leader in Egyptian-accented Arabic.

“No,” the children replied.

“What would we do with him?” the leader asks.

“Slaughter him,” came the answer, in unison.

The speaker congratulates his young listeners. “Slaughter him, right. Because he is an infidel,” he says. (Contributor: By Joby Warrick for The Washington Post)

First, let us acknowledge that this is an extremely sad, heart-wrenching news item. But beyond news, it is further evidence of a nation that has lost its soul, as it trains Islamist youth to become killing machines, motivated by demonic principalities and powers. Beyond that, however, we are reminded that the goal of this training—indeed, with every action linked to al-Qaeda’s murderous intentions—is the destruction of Israel and, if it were possible, the United States. The article, chilling as it is to read, supports the assertion that the focus of hatred being taught these boys is the Jewish state. So let us pray accordingly. This is not the last time this year—far from it!—that we will discuss and pray about the four-way, fragile connections among the U.S., Syria, Iran, and Israel. And our special focus of prayer, regardless of personal politics, must be that God will guard and protect our president from the “fatal” blunder for any nation, namely, the failure to stand with Israel in its challenges. Please note the Scriptures below and pray accordingly. The promises of God cannot be abrogated, and the Scripture cannot be broken.

“Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Gen. 12:1-3)

“Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, You are gods…’ If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken) …’” (John 10:34-35)

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you….’” (Psalm 122:6)
MEDICINE’S GROWING SPIRITUALITY

In a health crisis, patients and families may turn to a member of the hospital staff who offers help beyond the physical aspects of medical treatment: the chaplain.

With growing recognition of the role of spirituality in health care, hospital chaplains are being called on to help patients cope with fear and pain, make difficult end-of-life decisions and guide families through bereavement after a loss. They may help sick or dying patients reconnect with estranged family members. New guidelines call for chaplains to be included on teams of doctors and nurses who provide palliative care—which specializes in relieving the pain, symptoms and stress of serious illness. And chaplains often step in to help clinicians deal with their own feelings of stress and burnout.

Nearly 70% of community hospitals surveyed in 2011 provided chaplaincy services, up from 62% in 2003, according to the American Hospital Association.

The New York–based HealthCare Chaplaincy provides chaplaincy services in the city’s health facilities, offers educational programs for professional chaplains, and conducts research in the field. Because so many patients and caregivers are dealing with chronic illness outside the hospital setting, the nonprofit organization is planning to launch a new website, ChaplainsOnHand, which will include a Chat With a Chaplain feature to allow users to communicate by email or phone with a professional chaplain.

In Times of Trouble

"Now seems to be the time for spirituality to come along in health care, as everyone recognizes we are all body, mind and spirit," says the Rev. Eric Hall, a Presbyterian minister and the group’s chief executive officer. "At times of difficulty, the chaplain is an incredible resource to engage and guide and direct."

Chaplains are typically board-certified by one of several professional associations following at least 1,600 hours of education. While they may come from different religious affiliations, they are able to minister to all faiths—or to those who don’t have a specific religion but feel the need for spiritual guidance or discussion, Mr. Hall says.

A Pew Research poll last year found that the number of Americans who don’t identify with any religion increased to nearly 20% of all adults from 15% five years earlier. Yet Pew also found that many of the country’s 46 million unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual in some way, with two-thirds saying they believe in God and more than a third classifying themselves as spiritual but not religious.

The Big Picture

Wendy Cadge, a sociology professor at Brandeis University and author of the 2012 book “Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine,” says she has seen nurses in intensive-care units pray for patients, or respiratory therapists say a prayer when they must remove a breathing tube, in the presence of family. But chaplains “define healing in a much broader, more holistic way than other members of the health-care team,” her research found, and they almost universally they believe they can best facilitate healing by helping patients tap their inner resources, rather than by calling on a higher power to intervene in their outcome.

Until recently there has been little data on what U.S. medical schools teach with regard to spirituality. A 2010 survey by researchers at Duke University Medical Center found that 90% of medical schools have courses or content on spirituality and health. Ms. Cadge says such courses, along with an increase in academic research, have helped raise awareness among doctors about spirituality’s importance to health.
At Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Sister Kathleen Gallivan directs a chaplaincy-services department with about a dozen chaplains available in the hospital 24/7. Often, they are called in the middle of the night when a crisis occurs, such as a new trauma victim coming in through the emergency room or the death of an infant. Her team will call in outside clergy from a specific faith if requested, but provides rituals and prayers for every religious tradition. They have blessed stem cells before transplant and held bedside wedding ceremonies for dying patients.

Sister Gallivan, a Roman Catholic nun who has a master of divinity degree and a Ph.D in pastoral psychology, says chaplains are a crucial part of the movement known as patient- and family-centered care. “Everyone else has a task in health care, and our job is to listen,” she says. “A lot of what we provide is emotional support, even if we do nothing but sit with someone for presence and companionship.” (Contributor: Laura Landro for The Wall Street Journal - Ms. Landro is a Wall Street Journal assistant managing editor and writes the Informed Patient column.)

Offer thanks to the Lord that many hospitals are recognizing the wonderful power and grace that the Lord brings to the patient in need of His healing touch.

“Cry out to me whenever you are in trouble; I will deliver you, then you will honor me.” (Psalm 50:15)

U.S. CONGRESSIONAL PRAYER CAUCUS ISSUES FOR PRAYER IN 2014

Opposing hostility towards faith in the Air Force - Congressman Randy Forbes joined Congressman Diane Black and Congressman Todd Akin in sending a letter signed by 66 Members of Congress urging Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta to investigate a pattern of hostility towards faith in the United States Air Force. Over the last year, the Air Force has repeatedly capitulated to pressure from outside groups to remove religious symbols and references to faith from the service. The letter calls on Secretary Panetta to issue clear Department of Defense policy guidance, consistent with our Constitution, to preserve the place of religious expression in the military at large.

Urging the President to preserve religious hiring rights - Congressman Randy Forbes and Congressman Mike McIntyre sent a letter to President Obama, urging him to maintain current policies that allow faith-based organizations that consider religious criteria in their employment decisions to perform contract work for the federal government.

Supporting legislative prayer at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit - Thirteen Members of the House of Representatives have joined the Family Research Council (FRC) in submitting an amicus curiae brief to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit in support of legislative prayer. The Lakeland City Commission in Florida had a policy of inviting clergy to offer invocations at the beginning of its meetings. The Atheists of Florida sued, arguing that because most of the prayers were offered by Christian clergy, the prayers were “too sectarian” and thus violated the Establishment Clause. The brief submitted by the Members argues that courts do not have the jurisdiction to delve into the inner workings of a deliberative body’s meetings because of the constitutional separation of powers between the branches of government.

Supporting the freedom of school boards to open meeting with prayer - Members of the Prayer Caucus are supporting a resolution introduced by Congressman Tim Walberg that supports the freedom of school boards to open meetings with prayer. H.Res.662 expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that school boards are deliberative bodies similar to city and county councils and state legislatures, and should be treated as such for purposes of analyzing the constitutionality of their prayer policies.
Working to protect the symbols and traditions of Christmas - Members of the Prayer Caucus are supporting H.Res.489, introduced by Congressman Doug Lamborn, which expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that the symbols and traditions of Christmas should be protected for use by those that celebrate Christmas. Each year during the Christmas season, there are increasing efforts to remove religious symbols and references from the holiday. H.Res.489 emphasizes that the First Amendment does not require bans on religious references to Christmas, and supports the use of these symbols by those who celebrate Christmas.

Urging Vanderbilt University to protect religious student groups - In October of 2011, Congressman Randy Forbes led 22 Members of Congress in sending a letter to Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos of Vanderbilt University, urging him to ensure that the school’s nondiscrimination policy was not being interpreted in a manner that discriminated against religious student groups. Several religious student organizations at Vanderbilt, including the Christian Legal Society and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, were placed on “provisional status” for requiring their student leaders to share the groups’ religious beliefs. Thirty-five Members then sent another letter in May of 2012, expressing continuing concern that the school’s nondiscrimination policy requires all student groups to open leadership positions to all students, yet exempts fraternities and sororities from the requirement while refusing to exempt religious student groups.

Fighting attempts to remove “Under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance - Members of the Congressional Prayer Caucus lead in sending a letter to NBC, expressing concern over the network’s omissions of “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance twice in a video montage aired during coverage of the U.S. Open. In response to the letter sent by 108 Members of Congress, the network reprimanded the employees responsible for the omissions and implemented safeguards to prevent similar instances in the future.

Opposing efforts to remove a memorial cross honoring military veterans - In January of 2011, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that a cross displayed at the Mount Soledad Veterans Memorial in San Diego, California was unconstitutional. Members of the Prayer Caucus signed on to an amicus curiae brief submitted to the Ninth Circuit asking the full court to reconsider the case, and asserting that the cross’s presence at the memorial is constitutional. After the Ninth Circuit declined to reconsider the case, Members joined the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) in submitting an amicus curiae brief to the Supreme Court of the United States, asking the Court to take up the case and reverse the Ninth Circuit’s decision. In June of 2012, the Supreme Court announced that it would not review the case; however, Justice Alito issued a statement saying the appeal may have been premature and the Court may reconsider the case after the district court issues a final order on the fate of the memorial.

Urging religious freedom protections for service members - The repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in the military raised concerns that service members whose consciences or religious beliefs conflicted with homosexual behavior would face discrimination and disapproval. Members of the Prayer Caucus sent a letter to President Obama, urging that specific religious freedom and conscience protections be adopted during implementation of the repeal to formally assure all Americans that our citizens need not leave their faith at home when they volunteer to serve.

Affirming America’s rich spiritual heritage - Co-chairmen of the Congressional Prayer Caucus, Congressman Forbes and Congressman McIntyre, reintroduced legislation to recognize our nation’s religious history. H.Res.253, America’s Spiritual Heritage Resolution, affirms the rich spiritual and diverse religious history of our nation’s founding and subsequent history, and designates the first week in May as America’s Spiritual Heritage Week.
**Working to decrease frivolous lawsuits challenging public expressions of religion** - Members of the Prayer Caucus are supporting H.R.2023, introduced by Congressman Dan Burton, which would ensure that the legal system is not used to extort money from state and local governments through frivolous lawsuits against public expressions of religion. H.R. 2023 would not prevent parties from filing lawsuits alleging Establishment Clause violations, but it would require each side to pay its own attorneys’ fees. The bill would limit the remedies available to the suing party, so the only relief available would be that the state or local government would be required to stop its public expression of religion, if the court deems it unconstitutional. The result would be a decrease in frivolous lawsuits and the assurance that state and local governments are not intimidated into halting constitutional public expressions of religion.

**Recognizing the significant impact of the Ten Commandments on America’s development** - Members of the Prayer Caucus are supporting H.Res.211, introduced by Congressman Louie Gohmert, which recognizes the significant contribution that the Ten Commandments have made in shaping America’s principles, institutions, and national character. The bill supports designating the first weekend in May as “Ten Commandments Weekend.” (Contributor: The Congressional Prayer Caucus)