Faith in the Corridors of Medicine

by David Liou, Rice University '12

Even before he stepped into the room to take care of the dying young woman, Dr. Farr Curlin could feel the raw emotions and powerful tension radiating down the corridors. "The mother and the husband of the patient were in an extremely heated argument," Curlin recalled, "They were arguing about what God's will was for that patient, about trusting God's sovereignty, and how they were to understand that."

As an active clinician caring for patients with advanced illness, Curlin often finds himself at the forefront of explicit crossings between religion and the practice of medicine. A strong proponent for "inviting and creating spaces where we can discuss issues in religion and medicine," he was featured as a guest panelist as part of the inaugural event of the Religion and Public Life Program at Rice University, titled Faith in the Corridors of Medicine. Along with Curlin, the inaugural panel event on December 3rd featured Dr. Wendy Cadge, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Brandeis University studying the formal and informal presence of religion and spirituality in hospitals.

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-Dr. Farr Curlin

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Dr. John Evans of the University of California, Sand Diego and Baruch Brody of Rice University will join Elaine Howard Ecklund, director of the Religion and Public Life Program, for a lively discussion of how different religious communities approach emerging topics on the medical ethics horizon, including reproductive genetic technologies.

Upcoming Events

Religion and Medical Ethics: The Meaning of Being Human
March 14th, 6:30 pm
The Baker Institute for Public Policy, Dore Commons
RSVP to bipprsvp@rice.edu

Reading Religion at Rice Paper Workshop
March 14th, 12 pm
Sewell Hall, Sociology Department Lounge
RSVP to kls4@rice.edu

Lunch with Religious Leaders and Students
March 15th, 12 pm
Cohen House, President's Dining Room
RSVP to kls4@rice.edu

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The panel discussion was designed to exchange ideas about the interactions between religion and medicine, including the role that a patient's spiritual and religious beliefs and practices may play in coping with disease, medical decision making, and other health-related processes. Set at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University, the unique setting attracted a wide public audience, including scholars of religion, medical professionals, policymakers, students, and lay people. Cadge remarked following the event how impressed she was by the range of attendees "from so many different disciplines gathering around areas of shared concern."

The panel event was followed by the subsequent Books in Public Scholarship event on December 4th, during which Cadge met with a small group of scholars and religious leaders to discuss her upcoming book, "Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine," focusing in particular on the presence of religion in neonatal intensive care units. Cadge remarked, "The Books in Public Scholarship event was a privilege. The commentators who provided feedback on my manuscript were excellent and the book will be stronger thanks to their input." Dr. Helen Rose Ebaugh, a Professor of Sociology from the University of Houston who gave feedback on the manuscript, felt that the Program "demonstrated ways in which Rice University and the University of Houston can work together to study religion in our city."
The Religion and Public Life Program ultimately has broader goals of translating important scholarly work about religion to relevant public audiences. "The event really showed how the Program can foster dialogue between religion and public life," Curlin remarked. "You just have to keep showing that religion is an issue that's on the table or just below the surface."

Interested in becoming a Religion and Public Life Fellow?

The Religion and Public Life Program is now accepting applications for undergraduate Fellow positions. This is your chance to work directly with Rice faculty on exciting areas of research. The Fellowship program is designed to provide Rice University undergraduate students with experience working in issues related to religion and public life. The Fellowships are oriented towards providing students with research experience, writing and editing opportunities, project management, and experience planning events.

For more information, please contact Katherine Sorrell at kls4@rice.edu.