

Removing Planks From Our Eyes: Caring Without Judging
Deborah Buscemi, MSW, LCSW
Rabbi Suzanne Griffel
Midwest Palliative & Hospice CareCenter

We all have biases – “planks in our eyes,” to paraphrase Matthew 7:5 - even those of us whose training in CPE, seminary, social work school, etc. has raised awareness of our prejudices and whose professional practice involves helping other people work through their prejudices. These biases, which can be so deeply ingrained that we no longer realize they are there, can act on us in subtle – and sometimes not-so-subtle – ways as we interact with our clients, patients, or congregants, as well as with our colleagues. As spiritual caregivers and members of health care teams, we must continually be assessing the strengths and needs of those we are working with, with the goal of determining how best to guide them in using their strengths to meet their needs. Such assessments are a necessary form of judgment, but our biases - whether conscious or subconscious, acknowledged or unacknowledged - can slip uninvited into our ongoing process of assessment and cause us to think about, talk about, and possibly even interact with our clients in a judgmental way.

How do we tell the difference between assessing and judging? How can we discern when we are thinking or speaking judgmentally and redirect ourselves? How do we provide care that is best suited to the needs of our clients, especially those who do not share our values and beliefs, while maintaining our professional integrity?

This seminar is pertinent to the practice of the seasoned professional and the new practitioner. Why? Because we are all human. Our religious traditions teach that in order to effect change in the world, we must start by working on ourselves; then we model with our colleagues and practice with our clients what we have learned and taught one another. There is a ripple effect as we start with identifying bias in ourselves, then work to break the barriers in our community relationships, and then transform the world at large.

We come together in this historic gathering with chaplains and other professionals. As we each share our own knowledge and experience with others, we build a foundation for the village of care that we would like our world to be, a place where judgmentalism is replaced by mutual respect.

Workshop Outline

- I. What are the “planks in our eyes”? Recognizing our biases
- II. Case studies of judgmental bias sneaking into patient care
- III. Using our good judgment without judging
 - a. Characteristics of judgment
 - b. Characteristics of judgmentalism

- c. Toward non-judgmental assessment
- IV. Tools for “removing the planks”
 - a. Active listening with an open heart
 - b. Texts from our and others’ religious traditions
 - c. Signals to help us recognize that our biases may be at work
 - d. Non-verbal communication
- V. Moving from judgmentalism to mutual respect
 - a. Ourselves and our colleagues
 - b. Our work with clients
 - c. The wider community