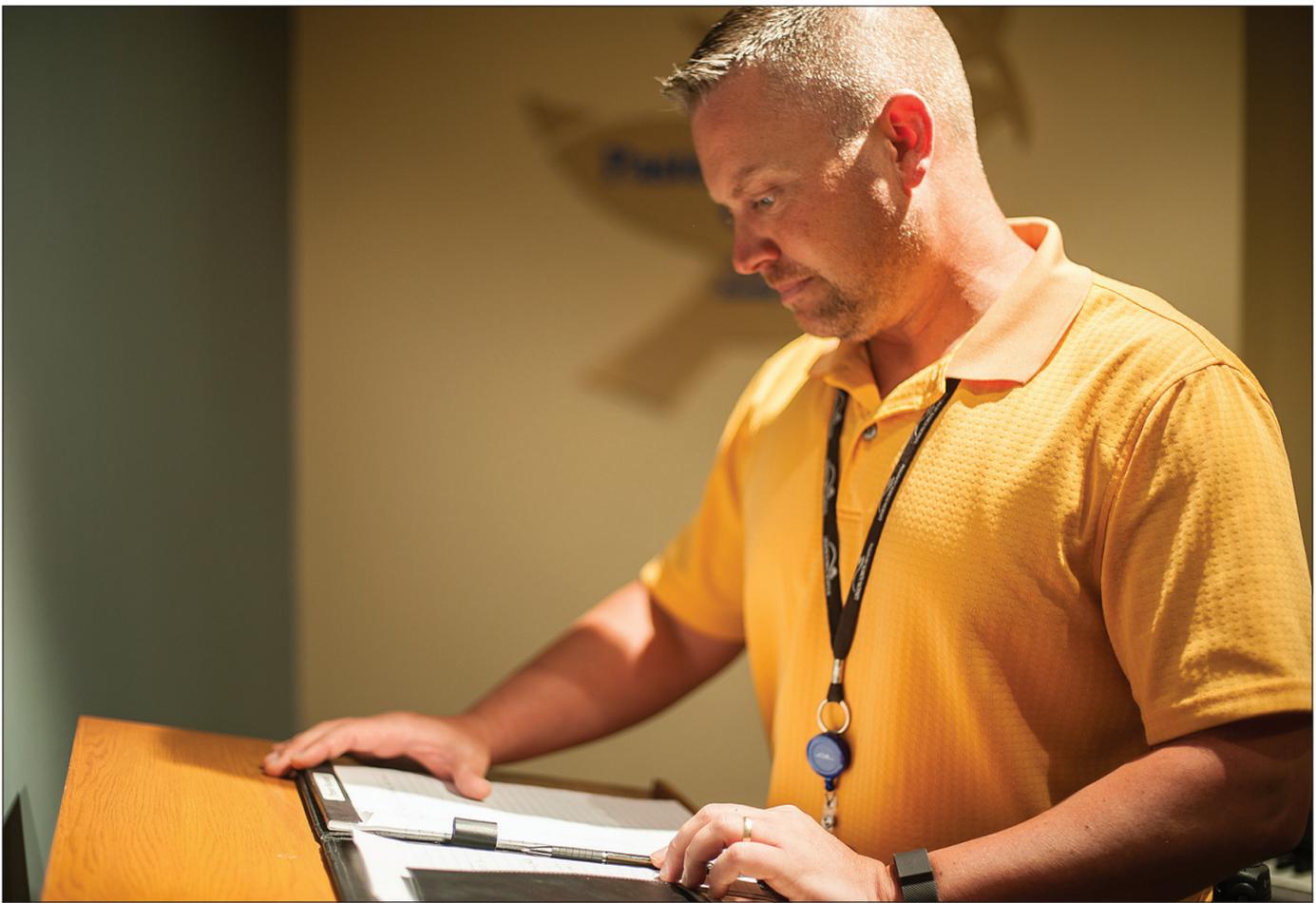


Divine intervention



ROBERTO M. ESQUIVEL | Herald-Standard

Mike Beachy, pastoral care coordinator for the Uniontown Hospital, looks over the prayer request book in the chapel of the hospital. Visitors and patients frequently write out their requests, which are then carried out by Beachy and other clergy.

Program gives spiritual relief at hospital

BY TARA RACK-AMBER
trackamber@heraldstandard.com

The Uniontown Hospital recently unveiled a new pastoral care program to provide spiritual assistance for patients admitted to the hospital.

According to the hospital's website, "The single goal of pastoral care is to support people attempting to cope with life-altering health care events and needs. Our pastoral/lay pastor volunteers are available for the primary purpose of administering to the needs of patients, their families and the hospital staff."

Mike Beachy, the pastoral care coordinator at Uniontown Hospital, said the organization could have chosen to go with a chaplain but decided to opt for a pastoral care coordinator because they felt the community would be better served by this approach rather than someone who would be the "be all to end all."

"It is beginning to take form and they (people at the hospital) are seeing it come to fruition," said Beachy.

The previous program at Uniontown Hospital was different than what is in place today.

"Prior to the implementation of the new program, we had a group of four or five local pastors who provided spiritual care as best they could for those in need at our facility. We tried to help facilitate these visits but recognized the need for something more permanent and centralized to ensure that all those in need of spiritual care were attended to, especially as several

"The single goal of pastoral care is to support people attempting to cope with life-altering health care events and needs."

— Uniontown Hospital website

of those pastors who were providing the care left the area," said Josh Krysak, community relations coordinator. "This new program now gives us the assurance that the spiritual needs of our patients are being met and also provides us the ability to coordinate and direct pastors into situations where they are most needed."

Today, through the Pastoral Care Department, the process is a little different.

"What is happening now is we have a couple of different options. When they are admitted they are asked if they want a pastor. If it is grave, someone will go immediately. We will make sure the pastor is there [within] 24 hours," said Beachy.

He added there are currently nine pastors in the rotation with at least four pastors on call at a time.

Beachy said that one of his goals is to have the team situated so that each individual pastor's gifts are able to be utilized.

"We are looking at having some specialized [areas] for emergent needs where

current pastors are more gifted in end of life or in new beginnings and new families," he said. "We have had some [pastors] serve at Family Beginnings Birthing Center when we had an emergent need from grief."

Just like specialties of the pastors are different, so is their approach of delivering their message to the patient.

"It is different depending on the pastor. Some of the pastors will say a joke to see a smile on a face that hasn't seen a smile for a while. There is a pastor that has an inspirational saying and will ask a few questions and picks a passage," explained Beachy. "Scripture tells us that we should be there to rejoice where there is rejoicing and weep with those who are weeping. It really falls into what the pastor is comfortable with."

Currently, the department covers a variety of

denominations of Christianity including Baptist, Catholic, Free Methodist, Pentecostal and non-denominational.

For those patients who are Muslim, Dr. Sajid Peracha, Internal Medicine-Hematology/Oncology with Uniontown Hospital, has often lead special prayers on Friday mornings.

In addition to providing spiritual guidance to patients, Beachy said the department has also conducted special prayers for the medical staff.

"In celebration of nurses week we were able to pray a blessing of hands," said Beachy. "We were able to reach out to everyone. It was a nice event."

While the department hopes to help the patient's spiritual health while they are in the hospital, Beachy said they are also working on helping the patient with their

spiritual aftercare once they are discharged.

He said that some of the patients that come to the hospital have strained relationships with their current church for one reason or another.

"If they are practicing, what we are trying to do is get that patient reconnected to that parish and that family. The pastor can then reach out to that parishioner," he said. "If [the pastor is] at the hospital visiting a patient that they know, they can also be notified of any other patients that are in the hospital so they can reach out and [rekindle] that relationship."

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