World AIDS Day

December 1st is World AIDS Day, a day to remember lives lost to HIV infection, celebrate the advances of science in treating those living with HIV/AIDS and renew a commitment to education and prevention. Here are some ways you and your faith community can show your support:

✦ Support AIDS education.
If your congregation offers a health care program, parish nurse program or sexuality education, include information about HIV/AIDS prevention, detection and treatment.

✦ Support HIV testing.
Clergy and laypeople alike can offer support to congregation members who choose to get tested for HIV. Compassion at this time can make a big difference to both those being tested and their families. Such support also reduces the stigma often associated with the disease.

✦ Contribute to HIV/AIDS prevention projects.
Both local and international HIV/AIDS prevention efforts benefit from financial contributions. Contributions are used to educate people about HIV/AIDS, provide treatment for those who are already infected and, in the developing world, focus on preventing the spread of the transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child.

By raising awareness in our congregations and communities, we can provide life-prolonging care and support for those already living with the condition, and we will be helping with HIV/AIDS prevention as well.

Prayer: Dear Lord, today we remember those who are living with AIDS. Bless them and the healthcare workers and researchers who stand with them in their struggle. Amen.

Resources: advocatehealth.com • aidschicago.org • worldaidscampaign.org • cdc.gov/hiv • aids.gov

Practical Guide to the Health Care System: Seeking support from your faith community while you are in the hospital

Hospitalization is a stressful time for both patients and their families, who often need and appreciate the support of their local faith communities. Unfortunately, hospital and clergy confidentiality practices can stifle communication about your condition, and members of your congregation may not even know that you’ve been hospitalized.

HIPAA. The federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protects patient privacy. While hospital workers and health care professionals can generally communicate between themselves about your condition, they need permission from you to discuss your condition with friends, family members or clergy.

Tips for Getting Support. Here are a few tips for letting people know about your condition and status:

✦ Explain preferences to clergy. Let your clergy person know the level of privacy that you want during and after your hospitalization. Clergy often take privacy issues very seriously, so it’s important that you tell him/her if you want members of your congregation to know that you are in the hospital.

✦ Contact hospital prior to admittance. Each hospital has its own privacy policy, so call ahead to find out what you can do to keep friends and family informed. You may be able to provide the name of your clergy person so that he/she can get status updates. Some hospitals also provide patients with privacy passwords that their friends and family can use when calling the hospital for information about your condition.

✦ Use social media. If you feel up to it, update your social media profile with information about where you are, how you are doing and whether you welcome visits. Sites like caringbridge.org let you or your family provide more detailed information during a lengthy illness.

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