

Advancing Whole-Person Care: The Role of Allied Health Professionals in Spiritual Care & Spiritual Vitality

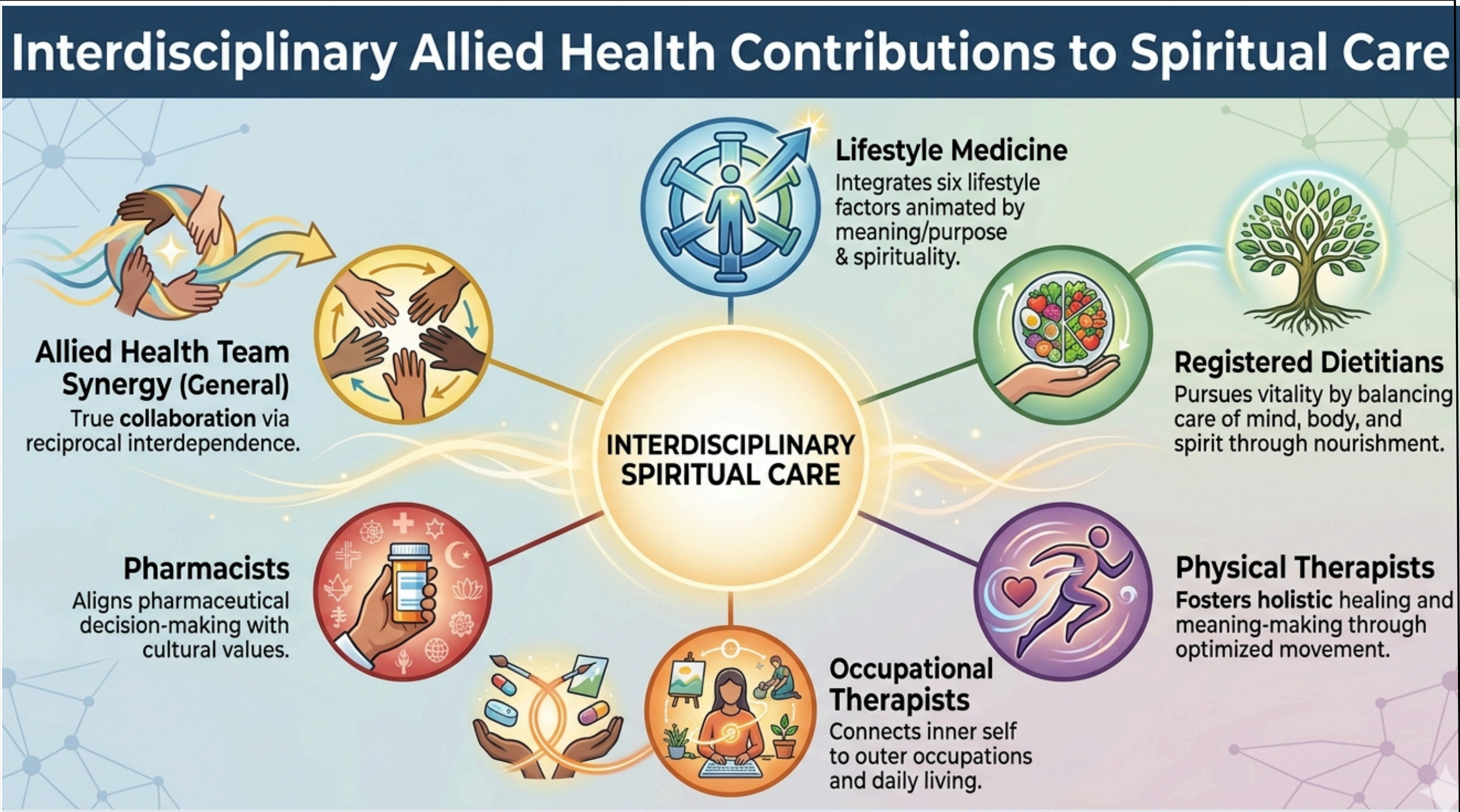
By Mary Gannon Kaufmann, MS, MA, RDN, BCC
Registered Dietitian & Board Certified Health Care Chaplain*

BACKGROUND

While allied health professionals are adopting spiritual care competencies, practice remains **discipline-siloed**. The resulting **"parallel care"** obscures unique professional contributions and **hinders true interdisciplinary collaboration** in supporting holistic patient well-being.

METHODOLOGY FOR THIS NARRATIVE REVIEW

- **Sources:** PubMed, ScienceDirect, Sage, NIH, ResearchGate, and other peer-reviewed sources in English from the last 5 years; seminal works were included.
- **Keywords:** Spirituality, interprofessional teams, and spiritual care in lifestyle medicine/allied health (PT, OT, Dietetics, Pharmacy).
- **Analysis:** 19 peer-reviewed articles (quantitative, qualitative, cross-sectional, and reviews) were analyzed using a matrix to identify provider trends and unique perspectives contributing to interdisciplinary care.



Whole-person care: Optimal results are achieved when diverse professionals share from their scope of practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Interdisciplinary Synergy: True collaboration relies on reciprocal interdependence between distinct providers. Patient outcomes improve when diverse clinicians assess and provide spiritual care through the unique lens of their specific disciplines.

Expanding the scope of spiritual care across disciplines emphasizes wellness, spiritual vitality, and purposeful living that integrates across all aspects of life.

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

Limitations include small sample sizes in some qualitative sets—offset by depth of practitioner narrative—and a general scarcity of research targeting specific allied health spiritual care models.

PURPOSE

- To identify and contrast the unique contributions of lifestyle medicine, physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), dietetics, and pharmacy to interdisciplinary spiritual care.
- To bring to light how **an appreciation of these differences** can facilitate interdisciplinary care and **more comprehensive, holistic care** of patients and their existential needs.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Each provider type contributes unique aspects of spiritual vitality by providing spiritual care as part of their primary scope of practice :

- **Lifestyle Medicine** integrates six lifestyle pillars, i.e., nutrition, exercise, and avoiding harmful substances, for greater meaning, purpose, and spirituality.
- **Registered Dietitians:** Pursue human flourishing by balancing mind, body, and spirit through nourishment. Healthy eating and lifestyle behaviors build motivation and insight into life priorities.
- **Physical Therapists:** Foster holistic healing and meaning-making through optimized movement.
- **Occupational Therapists:** Connect the inner self to outer activities through intentional daily living focused on vocation and self-care action. Reflection & action clarify purpose & spiritual values
- **Pharmacists:** Align pharmaceutical and science-based clinical decision-making with the patient's cultural and spiritual values.
- Current care models frequently fail to foster true **interdisciplinary collaboration or leverage discipline-specific expertise.**
- Recognizing spiritual care as an **essential, shared responsibility enhances therapeutic outcomes** across all disciplines.



IMPLICATIONS

Clinical: Spiritual care must be reinterpreted as an animating/integrating dimension of each discipline's distinctive focus of holistic care.

Educational: Each clinician type must receive spiritual formation & education in spiritual care distinct to their discipline.

Research: More studies are needed on this collaborative model of spiritual care encompassing this unique lens of a variety of provider