Rabbi Jason Weiner

The Year in Review

This past year the Jewish Chaplaincy team has continued to expand our scope of services to patients, families and staff. Under the leadership of Jonathan Schreiber, Director, Community Engagement, we have begun to reorganize our department, remodeling our offices and chapel and adding more personnel, an exciting process that will continue into the coming year.

Furthermore, as detailed in this report, we now have additional interns and volunteers, as well as weekend Rabbinic chaplaincy coverage. We have also continued our innovative programming, such as our Shabbat candle & challah distribution program, Sabbath elevators, mezuzot, Jewish television content, kosher food, sabbath and extensive Jewish holiday programming, traveling Torah, monthly sessions on Jewish Law & Medicine, and my weekly class in Jewish thought, which this year studied the entire book of Job, the kabbalistic self-improvement work, “Tomer Devorah,” and the Chassidic classic, “Tanya.”

Additionally, this year saw the introduction of a number of new events and programs for the benefit of our community. In an effort to be more effective for as wide a spectrum of patients as possible, we have translated our Jewish chaplaincy get well cards into Russian and Farsi, and broadened the variety of Jewish reading material and sacred literature available in our chapel. The chapel itself, our sacred space in the heart of the medical center, was remodeled to provide an even more serene, warm, and inspiring place for contemplation, prayer, study and gathering throughout the year. A special closet was added to the back corner of the chapel, freshly stocked by Bikur Cholim with countless necessities for traditionally observant Jews. For our largest annual services on the High Holidays, we move to the Harvey Morse Auditorium, which is transformed by our dedicated staff into a beautiful sanctuary. To better accommodate all who come to these services, for the first time we have produced our very own “Cedars-Sinai Machzor” (High Holiday Prayer Book) with easy-to-read Hebrew fonts, accompanied by transliteration, a contemporary English translation, and explanatory commentary.

This year we also filled the entire Harvey Morse Auditorium for our annual Rabbi Levi Meier, PhD Memorial Lecture on “Jewish Values in Patient Care,” dedicated to perpetuating the legacy of Cedars-Sinai’s first Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi Levi Meier. PhD whose life’s work touched the lives of thousands in the hospital and beyond with his unique wisdom and compassion. This year’s lecture featured Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, PhD, Executive Vice President Emeritus of the Orthodox Union and chief psychologist for various mental health foundations. This year’s fascinating presentation included a kosher lunch, and attendees were eligible for 1 unit of Continuing Medical Education.

Our chaplaincy program also widened its involvement within the broader community. In addition to continuing our co-sponsorship of LimmudLA, this year we also co-sponsored a Regional Yom Iyun (day of learning), along with the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, in partnership with the Kalsman Institute, the National Association of Jewish Chaplains and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, during which Rabbi Shira Stern addressed “Issues at the End of Life – Calm in the Face of Chaos,” and “Providing a Therapeutic Presence in the Midst of Anticipatory Grieving.” We also furthered our outreach to local synagogues, in partnership with Logan Williams, the Associate Director of Community Health and Education, where we offered free vaccinations, classes on health and nutrition by our leading experts, as well as sessions on advance directives, including a Shabbat presentation by Dan Stone, MD, MPH, MBA of Cedars-Sinai Medical Group and Cedars-Sinai Health Associates, delivering a presentation on maintaining a healthy lifestyle for senior citizens group at a local synagogue as part of our expanded community outreach.

Rabbi Jason Weiner became Vice-President of the Southern California Board of Rabbis and was honored by the Orthodox Union with their “Rabbinic Leadership Award.” Furthermore, Rabbi Weiner represented Cedars-Sinai as a scholar in residence at a number of synagogues and conferences all around the United States.

In August, Rabbi Weiner was appointed Cedars-Sinai’s first Senior Rabbi and Manager of Spiritual Care. In his new role, Rabbi Weiner has become responsible for the Chaplaincy Department, including all aspects of spiritual care at the Medical Center.

The Chaplaincy program gains its first “Senior Rabbi & Manager”
The Power of Presence: An Intern’s Perspective

Lucanne Tzijer

In addition to continuing to serve as a site for Rabbinic Interns and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) students, this year our Jewish Chaplaincy Department experimented with a new type of professional intern, a masters degree candidate from the School of Jewish Nonprofit Management at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

As a Graduate Student of Jewish education and Jewish nonprofit management, I have developed the capacities to educate and engage the Jewish community. Operating out of an ethic of care for the whole person, I desire to lead with empathy and spirit. That is why my internship in Jewish Chaplaincy at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is the third component of my three-legged stool of Jewish experience. I believe this third leg is also the one that will support my intent in my future endeavors—to lead purposefully, with compassion.

During the summer, I experienced the power of presence in healing. With an open mind and heart, I entered each patient’s room with kavannah (intention). A visit early in the summer gave me insight into healing’s multifaceted nature. On routine rounds, I encountered an unconscious patient in the intensive care unit who had just suffered a series of strokes. The power of spirit touched by the sick. I was touched by the power of spirit this summer and believe we all have the Divine spark; we can all do this work. That spark surfaces in our interactions with others and when a loved one faces hardship. To gain access to it often means simply attuning ourselves to those unspoken cues felt only in our hearts.

I learned that presence is essential to this work. Healing is a process that requires openness and patience. I noticed the very energy and care with which I entered rooms could ultimately bring calm to situations beyond patient visits, into my everyday life. I will carry this insight with me into my work as a Jewish communal professional. And I will continue to fulfill the mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim (visiting the sick). I was moved by spirit, and I was enveloped by spirit. In this moment, we were all k'irot (holy vessels).

I continued to meditate on the single word, Sh’ma, meaning “listen.” I prayed for strength and courage of both mother and daughter. Suddenly, the patient opened her eyes and became alert. The daughter’s eyes welled up with tears. As I stood at the bedside, still linked to patient and daughter, I felt enveloped by spirit. In this moment, we were all k’irot (holy vessels).

The Jewish Chaplaincy program has a very wide variety of warm and caring individuals who generously give of their time to be with our patients and help out in a number of ways. We would like to showcase some of our talented volunteers and encourage everyone who is interested in becoming part of this eclectic and enthusiastic team to let us know.

A CLOSER LOOK AT CEDARS-SINAI JEWISH CHAPLAINCY VOLUNTEERS

Daniel Rubin, who grew up just a couple of miles away from Cedars-Sinai, spent his entire break between completing service in the Israeli Army and beginning his studies at Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel volunteering at Cedars-Sinai, visiting and bringing inspiration to Jewish patients throughout the hospital.

Pre-Med student, Josh Morris, created a unique internship, collaborating with Jewish Chaplaincy and the Center for Healthcare Ethics, in which he spent half a day attending medical rounds on an Intensive Care Unit, and the other half visiting patients with Rabbi Weiner. Each volunteer brings something unique to patients, whether it’s the ability to speak Yiddish, like our veteran volunteer Rifkie Broid, or personal patient experience, such as that possessed by Esther Mayerfeld, who gave birth at Cedars-Sinai seven times. All of our Jewish Chaplaincy volunteers use their wonderful attributes of compassion and sensitivity as they reach out and connect deeply with patients and families in the Medical Center.
MAKING ANCIENT TEXTS MORE USER-FRIENDLY: CEDARS-SINAI OFFERS A HEBREW CLASS

MANY PEOPLE SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT Hebrew is a difficult language. The ancient Greeks purportedly used to say, “It’s all Hebrew to me.” Yet learning to read this ancient/modern language is relatively simple once you can distinguish the shapes and sounds of twenty-six consonants and about ten vowels. A friendly group of Cedars-Sinai employees and members of the community found this to be true when they attended the first-ever Introduction to Hebrew Reading class this past year. Paula Van Gelder, Associate Jewish Chaplain, was the instructor for the 10-week course, which met every Monday at noon. The students, from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, participated enthusiastically as they mastered new skills and found satisfaction in being able to recognize letters and words from the Torah and Hebrew prayer book. By popular demand, we are planning to continue with a Level II class that will enable participants to read texts more fluently and gain additional comprehension. Call Paula at 310-423-5291 if you are interested in this new course, which is scheduled for early in 2012.

CREATING MORE QUALITY KOSHER CHOICES

FOR MANY YEARS, CEDARS-SINAI HAS OFFERED STAFF AND visitors a variety of refrigerated kosher sandwiches, salads and snacks in the Kosher Corner of the Ray Charles Cafeteria. Most of these are readily to eat, while some require heating in a microwave. Now, however, for the first time, we are offering delicious, fresh hot kosher meals upon request at the entreé stations in the cafeteria. All of the double-wrapped food is under the kosher supervision of the Rabbinical Council of California. This coming year, more high-quality kosher options will be provided by Schwartz Bakery. Furthermore, every Friday, people entering the Ray Charles Cafeteria now notice a special display in our Kosher Corner—shelves of large, braided challahs, traditionally used on Sabbaths and festivals. These freshly baked breads from a local kosher bakery have proven to be very popular. One reason is undoubtedly their great taste, but another may be that many employees enjoy doing good by eating something good. As posted signs indicate, proceeds from the sale of challah go to the Cedars-Sinai Employee Emergency Fund.

As if this wasn’t enough, this year the cafeteria went to great lengths to provide a wide variety of selections that were kosher for Passover during the entire Passover holiday. In addition to the cafeteria, Cedars-Sinai has always been responsive to the special dietary and other needs of its patients. Recently, the department of Food and Nutrition Services received a number of requests for sugar-free kosher jelied desserts for diabetic and other patients. They immediately contracted with a supplier to obtain a certified kosher gel product. These naturally flavored and sugar-free products are now being used throughout the hospital for special diets and upon request, ensuring that all patients can enjoy them.

INCREASED RABBINIC CHAPLAINCY COVERAGE:

Weekend Chaplaincy

This past year, Cedars-Sinai received a grant from the Jewish Federation to engage the services of a weekend chaplain. Rabbi Michael Menitoff, PhD visits patients in the Medical Center on Saturdays and Sundays, and is on call for the entire weekend, as well as filling in and being on call whenever Rabbi Weiner is out of town.

OUR TRADITION TEACHES THAT IT WAS God who first performed the mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim, visiting the sick. According to the rabbis, we are enjoined to strive to imitate and emulate God. Just as God takes time out of His busy schedule to visit the sick, so too are we to follow suit. This notion is what the church fathers refer to as imitatio dei, the imitation of God, embodied in the opening of the Levitical code, “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

For the past year, and continuing into the next, I have been granted a sublime privilege to perform the mitzvah of weekend Jewish patient visitsations at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. Initially funded by a joint grant from the Los Angeles Jewish Federation and Cedars-Sinai, it is now being carried forward by the Medical Center itself.

A visit on Shabbat is especially lovely. (Sunday comes in a close second.) A greeting of Shabbat Shalom (or chavurah) comes in a close second. (Sunday comes in a close second.) A greeting of Shabbat Shalom (or Shabbat Shalom) is almost uni-

A Look Ahead to 5772/2012…

Stay tuned for many more exciting programs in the coming year including:

• New publishing, including a detailed Cedars-Sinai Jewish Patient Guide and expanded and improved Cedars-Sinai High Holiday Machzor (prayer book).
• The launch of our Jewish Expectant Parent Workshops.
• Exciting conferences and seminars on timely and relevant topics.
• The production of new Jewish DVDs to be shown in patient rooms daily and for Shabbat/holidays.
• A weekly Shabbat Minyan (prayer services) in our Chapel.

Please be in touch. Your participation or support of these and many other projects is warmly welcomed!