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HEALTH

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'Heal thyself': Program to help physicians reflect and renew

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Contributing Editor

An innovative program sponsored by Temple Chai's Deutsch Family Shalom Center and the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles offers physicians an opportunity to enhance their ability to heal others - and themselves.

Drawing on Jewish texts and shared learning experiences, the program will explore the connections between Judaism and health. Study modules include pain and suffering; death and dying; professional ethics, communication and relationships; and hope, explains Rabbi Mari Chernow of Temple Chai, who helped create the curriculum and will be one of its teachers.

"It's clinician-centric, not tradition-centric," stresses Dr. Howard Silverman of the content designed to attract participants from a wide range of Jewish backgrounds. Silverman, who has spearheaded the program, is assistant dean for Information Services at University of Arizona College of Medicine-Phoenix.

Using both real-time and online formats, "Judaism, Health and Healing for Physicians" will open and close with retreats, the first scheduled for the weekend of Feb. 15-18, the second for May 4, both at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, with 10 weeks of online interactive learning between.

The retreats, with both text study and experiential learning, including Shabbat observance, are designed to create a community of physicians drawn from a variety of specialties from across the United States. The intervening Web-based study can be done independently, according to each participant's schedule, though doctors will be paired with study partners for additional one-on-one interaction.

"We present the content online," explains Silverman, who has designed the site, "a chunk of text, commentary, study questions and dialogue questions."

The study questions are designed for chevruta, or paired study, in person or by phone. The dialogue questions are posed for the entire community of participants who may share postings and converse with each other online. Currently, 18 physicians, men and women of diverse ages from a variety of Judaic backgrounds, have registered for the course, says Sharona Silverman, Shalom Center director.

"It's entirely Talmudic," enthuses Howard Silverman of the interactive format.

Seeds for the program were sown several years ago through a project undertaken by Howard Silverman through the Shalom Center's Advanced Jewish Studies Program. Two Temple Chai retreats for physicians and health-care professionals underscored the need for spiritual renewal among physicians.

Michele Prince, Kalsman Institute director, has worked closely with Silverman in developing the program and will be another of its teachers along with the institute's Rabbi Bill Cutter. She explains that the program not only seeks to expose doctors to what Judaism has to say about health and healing but to help them recover through their study a connectedness to Judaism that can enhance their lives.

"The built-in structures of Shabbat, of study, of community, help people reflect and renew," she says.

Silverman notes the particular challenges innate in the practice of medicine, exacerbated more so today with increasing pressures in health care. Physicians need to find ways to defuse stress and prevent burnout, he says, and restore balance in their lives.

Time for reflection and study is one way to do that, he says.

"The solution," he says, "starts inside."

Details

- Who: Temple Chai's Deutsch Family Shalom Center and Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health of Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion
- What: "Judaism, Health and Healing for Physicians"
- When: Retreats: Feb. 15-18; May 4 with 10 weeks of online study in between
- Where: Franciscan Renewal Center, 5802 E. Lincoln Drive, Scottsdale
- Cost: \$600 for the opening and closing retreats and online study
- Contact: Sharona Silverman, director, Deutsch Family Shalom Center, 602-971-1234, ext. 280, ssilverman@templechai.com.