

Meet Kyle Turver, Spiritual Health Counselor at Fred Hutch Cancer Center

A Unitarian Universalist chaplain by training Turver talks with cancer patients, their caregivers and families. And he sings! [VIDEO]

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Kyle Turver is a spiritual health professional at Fred Hutch Cancer Center who sees patients and their families on Wednesdays at the proton therapy facility.

A Unitarian Universalist chaplain by training, Turver is available to talk with patients, their caregivers and families one-on-one about how they are doing emotionally as well as offer some of Fred Hutch's myriad resources. He also counsels staff, giving them a safe place to talk, teaching them coping skills and tactics to help decompress from work.

Turver wasn't always a chaplain. He began playing guitar and writing music in grade school and high school and his first college degree was in music. He even made a career of it, acting as Worship Director for a church, rehearsing the choir and handling "all things music" for 20 years. During that time, he realized he liked providing guidance and care to others and decided to go into seminary. There, he learned to give one-on-one spiritual and emotional support and later, joined Fred Hutch to counsel patients receiving cancer treatment.

"Being a musician taught me how to be a chaplain more than anything else," Turver said. "As a musician you learn to listen carefully to your bandmates, to find your contribution to the music. As a chaplain, I listen to the contribution of the patients — their concerns and emotions — and I bring my voice to the conversation in harmony and concert with theirs."

Although he sometimes brings his guitar to a session, Turver writes and plays music mostly for himself.

"It acts as a way to process emotions, to ground myself," he said. "When you're helping others deal with intense emotions, you need a place to find solace. Music helps me decompress."

Music also inspires him – as do his patients.

"I'm inspired by my patients' stories and experiences," he said. "Each interaction with a patient is an opportunity. My songs reflect our collective thoughts and needs in a more abstract way."

Sometimes the resulting music is uplifting, sometimes melancholy. But it always helps.”

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