

Religion and Health: Practices, Priorities and Possibilities
Keith G. Meador

The relationship between religion and health is an old one, but research and renewed interests of the last couple of decades have enlivened the conversation and exchange at their intersection. What might have seemed to be an engagement of lost relevance - with contemporary practices of medicine having become more refined and grounded in substantive advances in science - has instead gained increased significance as we come to understand better that optimal utilization of the advances we are making in medicine requires a more comprehensive grasp of the contributors to human motivation, self-understanding, and formation in personal and communal practices that affect health and health care. Prospective health care engages all of these dimensions of health and offers an innovation in health care within which to examine religion and health as part of an increasingly urgent cultural conversation.

This course will include a review of the social and historical context within which the relationship between religion and health has evolved, and will examine the scientific and medical literature with regard to relevant associations and implications for health and health care. Within that context we will consider the significance of diverse religious traditions as contributors to the current understandings reflected in this literature and how they inform the ongoing conversation. The significance of religious traditions and communities in the formation of cultural understandings of health and illness - as well as in the formation of personal identities and narratives - and their relevance to health and health care practices will be considered. Along with ethical issues such as resource allocation and possibilities for preventive health care, we will examine the dynamic relationship of health care providers and patients within the intersections of religion and health.