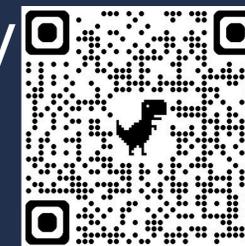




Advancing Online Spiritual Care: A Three-Phase Study with Chaplains on Co-Designing New Models of Delivery

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Abstract & References

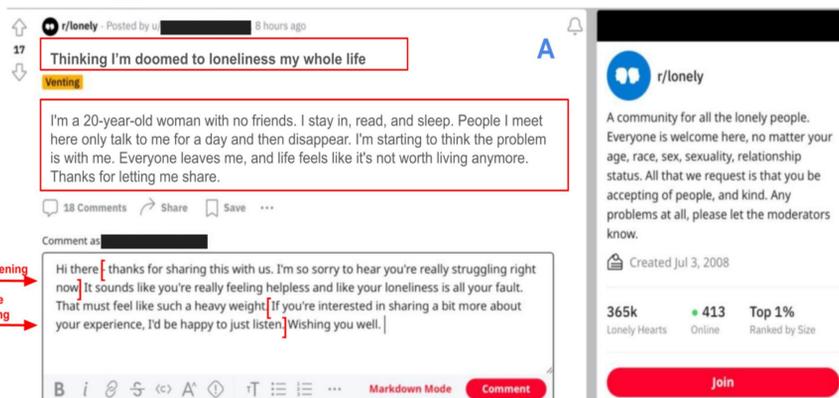
Overall Project Motivation

- During COVID-19, access to spiritual care was severely limited
- Beyond COVID, millions continue to seek support online for spiritual and existential concerns during serious illness, e.g., **loneliness**
- Need to explore alternative models of spiritual care delivery
- This 3-phase project examined acceptability, feasibility, and design of **Online Spiritual Care Communities (OSCCs)**

Phase 1: Interviews & User Testing

Methods:

- **Interviews** with professional spiritual care providers (*n=22*)
- **User testing sessions** to elicit feedback on “state-of-the-art” online support communities on [Reddit.com](#)
- **Ideation** on what needs to change to enable meaningful spiritual care in future OSCCs
- **Simulated user interaction:** Writing responses to real, unfiltered user posts



Active listening
Encourage story-telling

Results:

- Accessibility & scalability
- Increased agency for patient-initiated care
- **Care Loop Model:** OSSCs should be implemented as a supplemental form of care to extend clinical care pathways

Concerns:

- Trustworthiness
- Online risks, e.g., scams
- Distracting/busy UI/UX
- Need user trainings
- Need referrals to formal care

Referring online users to standard care

“Encourage to seek support,” e.g., provide direct links, referrals, or resources to connect users with healthcare professionals, hotlines, etc.

Institutionally-Based Formal Care

Traditional care (in-person or virtual). Subject to medical liability, HIPAA constraints, insurance, financial structures, regulatory training.

Platform-Based Community Care

Informal care in online communities. Currently unclear financial accountability & not subject to traditional medical constraints, training, regulation. Requires careful future work.

Recommending patients for supplementary online community support

E.g., clinicians provide information on trusted online communities and integrating these options into care plans.

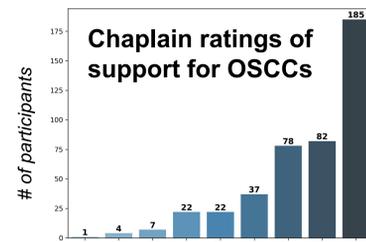
Phase 2: Large National Survey

Methods:

- **National Survey:** USA stakeholders (*n=1010*)
 - Spiritual care providers (*n=437*) and lay users (*n=573*)
- **Distribution Partners:** Spiritual care orgs (e.g., APC, SCA) and online communities (e.g., CaringBridge, Reddit, Facebook)

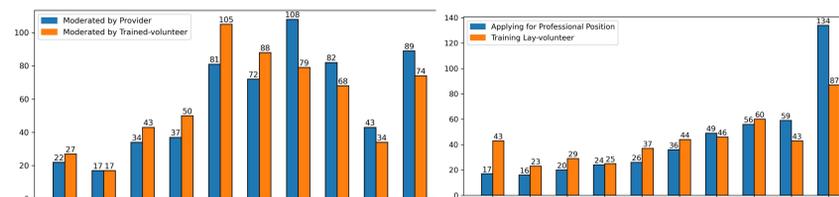
Results:

- **Excessive support** from chaplains to invest resources in implementing OSCCs
- Significant preferences to **build new communities** rather than rely on existing ones
- OSCCs will require institutional affiliation for feasibility & trust



“Extremely oppose” ↔ “Extremely support”

Preferred Moderation by Professional Chaplains:

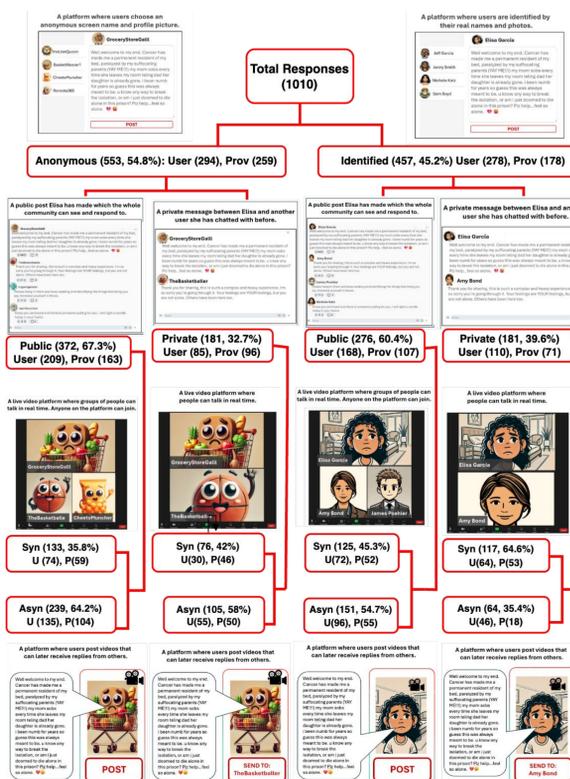


Users prefer moderation by professional chaplains (rather than lay volunteers)

Chaplains prefer applying to a job as a moderator over training lay volunteers.

“Build Your Own Online Spiritual Care Community” Design Tournament:

Anonymous or Identified? | Public or Private? | (A)synchronous?



Purpose:

Determine feasible and acceptable affiliations and design configurations.

Grounded in narrative comic of a fictional user persona, **Elisa Garcia**, a patient with end stage cancer.

Most Popular:

Anonymous, Public, & Asynchronous
(Similar to Reddit)

Phase 3: Co-Design Workshops

Methods:

- **Co-design workshops:** Chaplain participants (*n=24*)
- **Purpose:** Design novel interfaces (UI/UX) that can effectively mediate spiritual care via community
- **Interface Prototyping** with CaringBridge.org



Trusted nonprofit health blogging for patients & caregivers since 1997

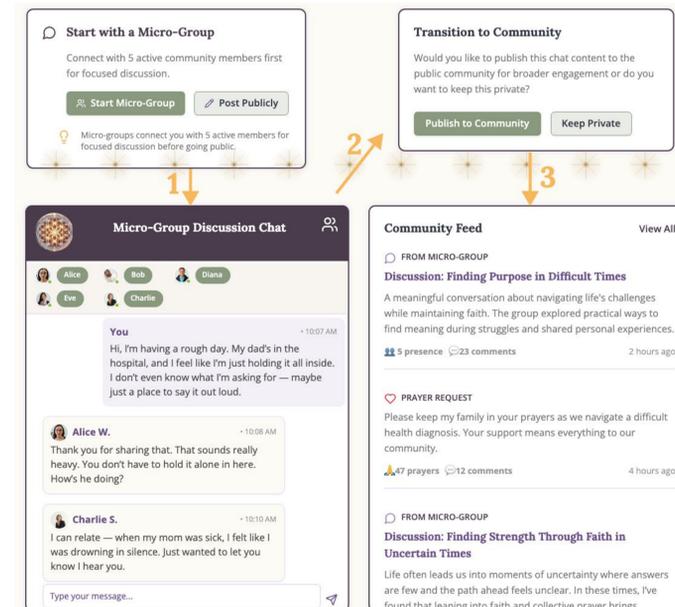
Surrounded with support at every step of the health journey

CaringBridge is a trusted place to communicate to your community, capture your thoughts, and coordinate help on your terms.

Create a CaringBridge Page Find a CaringBridge Page

Hybrid OSCC Configuration:

Begin with “Micro-Group” (Synchronous, Private, Identified)
Transition to “Congregation” (Asynch, Public, Anonymous)



Digital Presence & Relational Togetherness:

“Light a candle” provides nonverbal solidarity and shared presence through ritualized transition from asynchronous feed into a synchronous space with others.

