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Catholic Health Australia and Australian Catholic University host global health leaders on World Day of the Sick

An online forum hosted by Catholic Health Australia and the Australian Catholic University will discuss how solidarity and cooperation are key to dealing with the challenges of COVID-19.

The forum, which is being held on World Day of the Sick on February 11th, will examine new community strategies to address one of the greatest public and mental health challenges the world has ever faced.

Key speakers at the event; *Vaccines, viruses and vulnerabilities: Catholic health and care of the human person*; include the [current Vatican Commission coordinator for COVID-19 response](#), Sister Carol Keehan and Doctor Brian Kane – Senior Director of Ethics of Catholic Health Association in the United States.

Sister Keehan is the former head of the US Catholic Health Association and was heralded by President Barack Obama as essential in getting the affordable Care Act passed in the US which provided an extra 20 million Americans with health insurance. Dr Kane is considered a global thought leader in the field of academic and clinical bioethics, with a particular interest in palliative care and end of life decision making.

The forum will be moderated by Dr David Kirchhoffer, Director of the Queensland Bioethics Centre. Discussion topics will include the need to maintain both human dignity and scientific rigour.

Sr Carol said: “We need to focus on the importance of the spiritual component in the care of the sick both for the patient and caregiver and how this is especially true in the pandemic.

“We are doing important work in the Covid-19 commission with an emphasis on the primary goal of equitable distributions of vaccines and treatments globally.”

“These are issues that are front and centre of the Catholic health and aged care systems around the world.”

Dr Kane said: “The past year has highlighted the need to think globally about the sick. While much of the developed world is succumbing to individualism over society, the Catholic community must offer an alternative view of the necessity of the Common Good.

“The World Day of the Sick calls us to reflect upon the blessing of life. While sometimes we are strong, at other times we are also weak and dependent. As human persons, we as a community reach out to each other with charity because of our common humanity. The strong should care for those in need, who in turn teach us from their own lives.

Dr Kirchhoffer said: “The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to new vulnerabilities and exposed existing ones that may have been overlooked by our healthcare systems.

The exposure of systemic vulnerabilities demands attention and action in a way that does not reduce those who experience them to their vulnerabilities, but instead recognises their humanity and seeks to address vulnerabilities in ways that affirm their fundamental worth and help them to flourish despite their vulnerabilities.”

CHA CEO Pat Garcia said: “World Day of the Sick is an important date in the calendar, even more so given the ongoing pandemic. The care that our members deliver encompasses the whole person: body as well as mind, spirit as well as family and connection to the community to which a person belongs.”

“We are proud to be part of an event that brings together leading thinkers in the Catholic world to address the challenges facing our members who strive every day to achieve those goals.”

Executive Dean of Theology and Philosophy at ACU Professor Dermot Nestor said the forum would address the human questions which underlie the practical problems of illness.

“The message from Pope Francis for World Day of the Sick reminded us that an effective health treatment must have a relational aspect and that doctors, nurses, professionals and volunteers need to accompany the sick on a path of healing grounded in a trusting interpersonal relationship. CU is a leading institution both for the training of health professionals and for the study of ethical and religious questions so we are proud to be able to contribute in this way.”

[World Day of the Sick](#) was first introduced by Pope John Paul II almost three decades ago as a way for believers to offer prayers for those suffering from illnesses. The day coincides with the commemoration of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Pope Francis said this year's day of the sick is "is an opportunity to devote special attention to the sick and to those who provide them with assistance and care both in healthcare institutions and within families and communities. We think in particular of those who have suffered, and continue to suffer, the effects of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic'.

The event is free to the public. You can register your details [here](#)
RSVPs are required by Monday 8 February.

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