



**We are  
Called**

TO HEAL. TO UNITE. TO JUSTICE.

## Team Reflection - Huddle

### **No. 14 Home Hospice and the Black Community**

When Dr. Jessica Zitter met Sharrita Berry, a 52-year-old woman diagnosed with rapidly advancing COPD, she began by leaving aside medical lingo and instead invited Ms. Berry to share her experience of her life. After generously listening to the patient, Dr. Zitter asked Ms. Berry about a breathing machine. Ms. Berry expressed fear she wouldn't get off it. The physician agreed and began to tell her about home hospice.

Ms. Berry's decision for home hospice was relatively unusual for a Black patient facing a terminal condition. Sadly, due to historic wounds of medical abuse by white physicians and administrators, racial inequities appear in end-of-life care today, resulting in mistrust by Black communities across the U.S. Studies show when facing end-of-life situations, people of color are more likely to request high-intensity treatments and tend to die more often on machinery in facilities and away from their homes. [14.1] While home care entails identifying support and the participation of the community, faith communities often hold trust with parishioners and can provide the necessary community support.

Dr. Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, a Black Catholic bioethicist and nurse, describes how "Black people hail from a culture of deep religious roots; they have found meaning in pain and suffering through the black spirituals and reflection of the paschal mystery of the Black Jesus." [14.2] She envisions health care to the Black community to be holistic, communal, spiritual and humanistic. Clinicians may find this vision at odds with the values of autonomy and agnosticism. Yet, tapping into spiritual care resources and faith communities in the neighborhoods beyond the hospital, the desires of those like Ms. Berry can be achieved.

### **Consider**

Recall a recent situation with a patient when you listened whole-heartedly to her or his experience? What did you notice about what they were deeply seeking?



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**Let us pray together,**

*God of time and eternity,*

*Be close to your people, especially those whose numbered days are fewer and drawing to an end. Help us to imitate your gentle love in remaining close to them, in listening with supple hearts to their needs and desires, so that we might support the comfort they need, sustain family and loved ones and entrust them at last to your eternal care.  
Amen.*

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[14.1] <https://centerforhealthjournalism.org/fellowships/projects/racial-disparities-end-life-care-how-mistrust-keeps-many-african-americans-away>

[14.2] Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, "Code Black: A Black Catholic Liberation Bioethics," *The Journal of Black Catholic Theology* 3 (Fall): 29-59. 2009.