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Certification awarded to first 'spiritual care provider' group

• By DANIELLE ZIRI

A group of 22 Israelis were officially certified this week as spiritual care providers – people who use spiritual healing to counsel the dying or those battling severe health problems.

The event – which took place as part of the 10th annual Spiritual Care Conference on Tuesday and Wednesday in Neve Ilan – was the first certification of spiritual care providers in the country.

The 22 recipients had undergone a training program that the UJA-Federation of New York had brought to Israel and funded. It consisted of 800 hours of supervised didactic and clinical site-based hours. Running the program was the Israel Spiritual Care Network of Organizations, a group of over 20 organizations that work across cultural, social, and religious differences to promote spiritual care work and to professionalize the field to suit the needs of Israeli society.

Speaking to *The Jerusalem Post* on Wednesday, one of

the newly certified providers, Dr. Einat Ramon, referred to spiritual care as “a blessing to the Jewish People, to the State of Israel and to the Middle East.”

“It connects individuals to their inner light and to the inner light of others,” said Ramon, who is also the director of the Marpeh training program for spiritual care providers at the Schechter Institute.

“I have seen people grow closer to themselves and to one another in the context of offering and receiving spiritual care and in the process of training spiritual care givers,” she added.

While in Israel it was not officially recognized until this week, spiritual care is already an established professional and accredited field in the United States, where every hospital is legally required to offer access to a chaplain or spiritual guide as part of healthcare.

The UJA-Federation of New York launched the field of Jewish spiritual care in Israel in 2006. It has allocated over \$6 million in funding to sev-

eral training institutions, as well as to organizations that provide direct services in the country's major hospitals in Jerusalem, the Negev, Haifa and the Tel Aviv area. The funding has also gone to other community settings that serve the elderly, terror victims, at-risk youth, and cancer patients, among others.

“At the core of Jewish spiritual care is a recognition that Jewish values, tradition and liturgy, combined with standard bio-psycho-social interventions, provide a holistic framework for individuals to cope with life challenges,” said Alex Roth-Kahn, managing director of the Caring Commission at the UJA-Federation of New York, in a statement. “It is a uniquely Jewish response to the healing process.”

According to the federation, spiritual care provision is “a vital tool to support and give guidance to the gravely ill or those near death.”

The group said this week's event represented an “important milestone” for the field in Israel.