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HEALTH - The National Coordination of Hospital Chaplaincies (CNCH), together with the respective heads of Portuguese dioceses, aims to strengthen the quality of the spiritual and religious assistance to the sick. In a statement, the Catholic agency stressed the need for this service to become "an essential part of a wider and general project of assistance to people in a state of suffering".

During the debate on this theme, held in Fatima, Msgr. Manuel Linda, integrating bishops of the Bishops' Commission for Social Pastoral Care, highlighted "the importance of the Church's presence in hospital environments, and a specific assistance organization, in order to be as close as possible close to those directly living the experience of their sickness and pain".

"The Church must enhance health professionals linked to health and, in this context, those who dedicate themselves to the mission of spiritual and religious assistance, showing its specificity in an exciting and purposeful way", he added. According to the leaders of CNCH it is essential "to invest in the joint implementation of this service with other areas of support and assistance, ensuring appropriate technical, theological and human formation of chaplains and spiritual assistants, as well as in the preparation of volunteers and other workers operating in this field".

From this perspective, the Catholic organization has presented the creation of an "I.T. platform that will facilitate and disseminate to the public the activity of hospital assistants". Recently the Coordination published a book titled "The Church at the service of health - Pastoral guidelines for Catholic spiritual and religious assistance," written by Father Fernando Sampaio, coordinator of the hospital centre of north Lisbon.

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