
A Study on the Religious Beliefs in the Choice of Treatment Modalities

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Abstract: *Religious beliefs of persons who seek medical care is very often discussed in research circles to find out its impact or efficacy in the very healing process. The paper based on a masters level study in medical social work tries to explore the influence of religious background of the persons who seek medical care in different hospitals having a religious significance. The study is qualitative in nature and based on available literature and case studies try to explore the importance of religious beliefs and practices in choosing the type of hospitals for treatment. The study result shows significant correlation between the choice of the patient and religious orientation of the place of treatment at greater extent.*

Key Words: *Religious Beliefs and Practices, Treatment Modalities, Religious Orientation of Hospitals.*

1. Introduction

Religious beliefs and practices are common among patients seeking medical care, and even those who indicate that they are not religious often identify themselves as being spiritual in some way. Spirituality is more individualistic and self-determined, whereas religion typically involves connections to a community with shared beliefs and rituals. Religious belief, membership, importance, and attendance are prevalent and steadily increase with age. Since most patients with serious or chronic health problems are older, it is not surprising that many are religious. There is also a considerable gap between patients' and physicians' levels of religiosity.

One of the reasons why religious belief is so common among medical patients is that as people become ill, they experience stress over the changes in life that illness causes. Many who were not religious previously may turn to religion for comfort. Whether it is as a new method of coping or a lifelong

belief, religion becomes increasingly important as patients face the Goliath of illness. Those who seek comfort in religion approach it in many ways. In the religious based hospitals, this often involves belief in a loving and caring God, private religious activities (such as prayer and meditation), reading religious scriptures for direction and encouragement, or looking for support from a pastor or members of a faith community.

A growing body of scientific research suggests connections between religion, spirituality, and both mental and physical health. Recent studies indicate that religious beliefs influence medical decisions, such as the use of chemotherapy and other life-saving treatments, and at times may conflict with medical care. A growing body of scientific research suggests connections between religion, spirituality, and both mental and physical health.

Recent studies indicate that religious beliefs influence medical decisions, such as the use of chemotherapy and other life-saving treatments, and at times may conflict with medical care. Religious beliefs and practices are powerful sources of comfort, hope, and meaning, particularly in coping with a medical illness. When the people get chronic illness then they will think of God and most probably they will select religious based hospitals.

2. Review of Literature

Research on the relationships among religion, beliefs and health has grown dramatically over the past decade. It is clear from the literature that many in research, in health care, in the public, and in government, believe that important positive connections have been established and should be vigorously studied. It is also clear that others are unconvinced and even hostile to the subject. It is not surprising that such a deeply felt subject should be controversial when it makes its way into a field such as medicine. Nor should it be surprising that such a complex topic as health and religious, having been left out of scientific inquiry for so long, should prove difficult to study with the methods of science.

2.1 Analysis of Religious Beliefs and Spiritual Healing

Religion is generally understood as a set of beliefs, rituals and practices, usually embodied within an institution or an organization. Spirituality, on the other hand, is commonly thought of as a search for what is sacred in life, one's deepest values, along with a relationship with God, or a higher power,

that transcends the self. Persons may hold powerful spiritual beliefs, and may or may not be active in any institutional religion. Spirituality can be defined as “a belief system focusing on intangible elements that impart vitality and meaning to life’s events” (Maugans, 1996). Many in the baby-boom generation who claim not to be religious, admit to a sense of “reverence” for life, similar to the concept championed by theologian-philosopher Albert Schweitzer.

2.1.1 Religious Beliefs

Religious belief refers to attitudes towards mythological, supernatural, or spiritual aspects of a religion. Religious belief is distinct from religious practice or religious behaviours with some believers not practicing religion and some practitioners not believing religion. Religious beliefs, being derived from ideas that are exclusive to religion, often relate to the existence, characteristics and worship of a deity or deities, divine intervention in the universe and human life, or the deontological explanations for the values and practices centred on the teachings of a spiritual leader or group. In contrast to other belief systems, religious beliefs are usually codified (Testerman, 1997).

Religion is a subject that we encounter daily, because we follow a specific faith and the rules established by it. Religion is not only “researchable,” but it is also of essential interest to clinicians, doctors, patients and health psychologists. Religion has the benefit of empowering the individual through connecting him/her to a community, and to a superior force, that might in turn give psychological stability (Basu-Zharku, 2011).

2.1.2 Spiritual Healing

The Hamlyn Encyclopedia of complementary health (Sullivan, 1996) defines, ‘spiritual healing as the channeling of healing energy from its spiritual sources to someone who needs it. The word ‘spiritual’ refers to the divine nature of energy, which healers agree, comes from one external, invisible intelligent source.

Spiritual healing can help both physical and emotional problems. A goal of spiritual healing is to eradicate problems, usually starting in the mind, to restore balance to the person and continue spiritual awakening. Wounds, emotional or physical, impede our spiritual progress and therefore must be healed before awakening can continue. Spirituality is not a homogenous practice, but reflects individual expressions of being (Adegbola, 2006).

Spiritual healing exists in Christianity, Christian Science, Mesmerism, Shamanism and numerous other faiths. It involves an appeal to God or any higher power to heal others through prayer, meditation, faith and the transmission of energy through various means to the person who needs healing. It can involve divine intervention, faith healing and religious orientation.

2.1.2.1 Divine Intervention

The term divine intervention refers to a miracle caused by God's direct and active involvement in the human world. If you look at the words themselves, it means an intervening by a divine power. God got involved. God intervened. The healing of a person, through faith healing or spiritual healing could be considered divine intervention.

2.1.2.2 Faith Healing

Faith healing refers to supernatural healing; a healing that results from prayer or the laying on of hands, rather than medicine. According to author and theologian Andrew Village, faith healing is the idea that religious belief, or faith, can bring about healing. Faith healing occurs through prayers or rituals that evoke a divine power toward individuals who need healing of a disease or disability. Faith healing may take the form of prayer, a statement of faith in a god or gods and their ability to heal, the laying on of hands, anointing the sick with oil, visiting a religious shrine or other ritualistic variations on the same theme.

Dr. Stephen Barrett, M.D., claims that prayer, divine intervention and faith healing can cure illness have been popular throughout history. The Apologetics Index, non-profits online Christian ministry, says the term is most common in reference to Christianity. The Christian *Bible* is full of reports of faith healings, especially in the New Testament gospels. The group adds that advocates claim that, even in our modern age of medicine and technological advancement, faith healing has cured blindness, deafness, AIDS, cancer and a range of other diseases with wide success. These healings are often called miracles.

2.1.2.3 Religious Orientation

An individual's or community's religious orientation involves presumptions about the existence and nature of God or gods, religious prescriptions about morality and communal and personal spirituality. Such presumptions involve the study of psychology, ethics, sociology and anthropology. Religious

orientation means an attitude toward religion or religious practices. Orientation means an integrated set of attitudes and beliefs.

2.1.2.4 Spiritual Care

All people have spiritual needs. Some people have religious needs. The Pastoral Care Services Department works to help patients, family members and staffs addresses both spiritual and religious needs. Religious and spiritual concerns are particularly prominent during times of illness, suffering and death. Some medical leaders and policy-makers in the US have urged healthcare systems and providers to give due attention to patients' spiritual concerns (Williams, 2006)

2.1.2.4.1 Spiritual Needs and Concerns

Spiritual needs and concerns usually relate to what we call the “big” questions of life. These questions can include:

1. Why is this happening? Why is it happening to me?
2. What does it all mean?
3. How do I make sense of everything?
4. How do I feel about changes in my life?
5. What gives me comfort and hope?
6. What do I call “good” in my life? What do I call “bad”?
7. What am I grateful for?
8. What do I trust? Who do I trust?
9. Who is my “beloved community” — who loves me and is loved by me, no matter what?
10. What or who — beyond myself — do I believe is important in my life?

All of these questions relate to spiritual needs, concerns and resources. All people ask these questions during their lives, especially when they or someone they love are sick or in crisis.

Some people find meaning, comfort, hope, goodness and community through their religious practice, beliefs and/or community of faith. Some people do not. Regardless of whether religious faith is a part of a person's life, spiritual concerns, resources and needs can still be very important, especially during hospitalization.

2.1.2.4. 2 Spiritual Resources

Spiritual resources are practices, beliefs, objects and/or relationships that people often turn to for help in times of crisis or concern. Some spiritual resources include:

Music, Prayer, Meditation, Family and friends, Religious leaders, Priest, Rabbi, Imam, Supportive communities, Church, Synagogue, other support groups, Holy writings/scripture , Bible, Torah, Qur'an, Inspirational writings, Poetry, Devotional Materials, Prayer Books, Religion-specific items, Sabbath menorah, Rosary beads, Devotional pictures, Prayer rug, Sacramental practices, Communion, and Anointing

These resources can help people return to a sense of balance when their lives have been turned upside down. They can help people sort out the “big” questions in order to find meaning, comfort, hope, goodness and community in the midst of a crisis.

A religious based hospital provides, pastoral care, supports groups, insurance plans, financial supports and spiritual satisfaction.

2.1.2.4.3 Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is an ancient model of emotional and spiritual support that can be found in all cultures and traditions. It has been described in our modern context as individual and corporate patience in which trained pastoral carers support people in their pain, loss and anxiety, and their triumphs, joys and victories.

Pastoral care as a care model and profession is emerging in the public arena in its own right, in our day, and its value and helpfulness is now recognized as applicable to people generally in their everyday life.

Just as its theory and philosophy is not dependent on any one set of beliefs or traditions, so pastoral carers are trained to relate gently and skilfully with the inner world of individuals from all walks of life, and the elements that go to make up that persons sense of self, their inner resources, resilience and capacity to cope.

They are not counsellors or therapists. They are personal relaters operating under a positive motivation that has no strings attached.

Holistic approach to the whole person to explore the inner essence soul in all of us: the inner world, historically Christian but is now a multi faith community caring for the sheep is the role of pastors (H. B. London)

2.1.2.4.4 Support Groups

Support is an important part of treating the emotional aspects of illness. Licensed, experienced social workers are available to help the patients and patient's family cope with illness in the religious based hospitals. There are different types of support groups in the hospitals.

2.1.2.4.5 Spiritual Satisfaction

Satisfaction: Everyone wants it. Yet everyone already has it even though they say that they do not. Satisfaction exists within every person. This is not some far-off potential satisfaction which exists in the imaginary future but a satisfaction which is very much happening here and now. There are different types of satisfaction: basically physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

Spiritual satisfaction arises from achieving your inner purpose, your innermost goals. This is not to be confused with imagined or externally defined goals. That would be like a mighty oak tree accepting the shrunken vision of a bonsai gardener. Whatever the gardener's aesthetic preconceptions are they are in no way aligned with the oak acorn's internal destiny. Similarly, and crucially, every human being has a life direction; one's guiding light, which is invisible to the outer eye. It is this inner guidance which must be honoured for spiritual satisfaction to exist. (Mickley, J.R., et. 1995)

2.1.2.5 Treatment Modalities

Treatment modalities can be simply defined as methods of treatment. These are ways in which a doctor or an allied health professional would go about treating a condition. It's not surprising to note that examples of varying treatments could include many methods. Some people are expert in a single method, and others have training in a number of different areas, all of which may be brought to bear for the benefit of a client or patient.

Another way in which treatment modalities is used is to talk about care options for the same disease. Instead of referring to a practitioner's methods, the term could be used to think about all approaches and the theories behind them that could be used. For instance, when people have haemorrhoids, doctors might consider the modalities available to determine best type of care. Options could include giving minor pain relief and changing diet while the matter resolves, using techniques that remove the haemorrhoids, or taking a surgical approach to cure protrusions not responding to other methods.

These different methods are each modalities or ways of accomplishing the same thing, and most doctors' expert in this issue would have experience with most methods.

Similarly, doctors can explore treatments for a variety of medical conditions. In cancer, multiple modalities like surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy could be used for treatment. Alternately, one method alone could be effective.

Religion/spirituality plays a vital part in medical decisions for many patients, sometimes leading to more aggressive medical interventions at the end of life. Again, here is another reason for taking a spiritual history. Spiritual and religious beliefs can have powerful effects on health and healthcare decisions, in either positive or negative ways, and physicians need to be aware of that.

Religious beliefs and practices help patients to cope better with their illnesses, enhance their social support, and help them to avoid self-destructive behaviours such as, substance abuse, it is important to understand how religion influences physical health through psychologic, social, and behavioural pathways (Koenig HG, et al., 1997).

The overall positive association between religiosity, mental health, and physical health, religion also influences factors that directly affect the delivery of health care. These factors fall into four major categories: medical decision-making, beliefs that conflict with medical care, spiritual struggles that create stress and impair health outcomes, a disease detection and treatment compliance (Frank E, et al., 1999).

3. Methodology

The aim of the study is to find the importance of religious beliefs in the life of patients. The following are the objectives;

To Study Socio demographic profile of persons with chronic illness to get treated at Puspagiri Medical College, Amritha Medical College and Jubilee Mission Hospital.

To Study the religious orientation and beliefs of the patients with chronic illness.

To explore the attitude of the patients towards the religious orientation of the Institute.

To study the religious orientation and attitude of the treating team.

The study was about the religious beliefs in the choice of treatment modalities belong to the age group of 20 to 60 from Kerala getting treatment at Pushpagiri Medical College Hospital, Thiruvalla, Amritha Medical College Hospital, Thirissur and Jubilee Medical Mission Hospital Palayam.

4. Case Studies

The qualitative analysis of the data obtained through semi structured interview schedule. The case study method is adopted in which 15 case studies are done. Each case follows the pattern of sociodemographic description of the respondent in the first paragraph and all other three objectives in the subsequent paragraphs. The last paragraph is the interpretation of the respective case as per the impression of the researcher. Three cases are selected from the 15 cases for this paper.

4.1.1 Case 01

Ms. Jolly Mathew is a 22 year young girl who was suffering from Leukaemia with chronic progressive pain and weakness, she feels that her faith offers the most help despite numerous medical interventions, for coping with her illness. She comes from an urban area, near Kayamkulam, Kerala. She attends Church regularly and has a strong faith. She is a M Com student and she is financially poor.

She had a history of bleeding and breathing problem for the past two years. She developed diffuse body pain. The end result was that it became difficult for the body to fight infections, control bleeding, and transport oxygen. She also tried acupuncture and massage yielding no benefit. The consulting oncologist did not have any further treatment to offer her.

Ms. Jolly Mathew continued to have diffuse body pain as well as increasing weakness of her lower extremities. During the course of her illness, she had steadfastly maintained her independence and good spirit. She had consistently stated that her faith in God had enabled her to endure her chronic pain. Her physician Dr. Radha Devi continued to struggle with the lack of traditional medicine to provide her one source of comfort and strength. The role this should play in her ongoing medical care remained a question. But she believed that God would help her to come back to life. Every day she was reading the Holy Bible.

Her spirituality, religion, and her beliefs (which included prayer and Bible reading) had an important role in the process. The Western religious worldview was an optimistic one that gives hope, purpose, and meaning to negative circumstances. Mrs. Jolly Mathew's strong beliefs frame her entire condition. Her trust and assurance were in God. She said that she prayed and read her Bible every day. Nothing came on the way of her prayer time and Bible reading. Regardless of whether an illness or health condition gets better or worse, having such a powerful belief in God may for some have a major effect in reducing loneliness and separation and reclaiming a sense of control.

4.1.2 Interpretation

Ms. Jolly Mathew was a faithful lady. In the midst of her pain she was searching on God's providence. She had no complaints to God. She selected Pushpagiri Medical College because it was a religious based hospital. She decided to come to this hospital for treatment because this Medical College provided good pastoral care and had the provision to receive Holy Communion every day. She had good family support. She believed that by the Grace of God she could get healing. The hospital authorities provided her some financial support. Therefore her belief system would have played a key role in the entire healing process.

4.2.1 Case 02

Mr. Rahul, 29 year old was a young business man belongs to Hindu Religion and he came from Chenganoor, a rural area of Kerala State. He was suffering from bladder cancer. Three months ago one morning he went to toilet and he saw that blood was flowing through urine. Quickly he went to Amritha Medical College for check up. There the doctors diagnosed that he had bladder cancer. Doctor said to him that it was the third stage so he should undergo an operation. The doctor suggested removing the bladder. But the problem was that if the bladder is removed then the natural urine pass would not be possible. He was mentally upset. The doctors gave counselling to him. After that the doctor sent him to their payer hall. He saw a number of patients and by standers were doing prayer. He also joined with that prayer group. He said that the prayers gave confidence in his life.

He agreed with doctor to get his bladder removed. He said that after the surgery if he would recover then he would join to Matha Amrithanada Mai

Ashram. Now he realized that life is a gift of God. He said when he became a patient he thought why he had got that disease. Now he understood that God needed me for His own work that's why He gave this disease to him.

He said that all this insight he got from this hospital. When doctor said about the operation he thought about suicide. But the treatment team through their care, love and prayer changed his mind. Thus he recovered and also motivates the patients to live in a happy way trusting the Almighty God.

4.2.2 Interpretation

He got good insight during illness time. Now he joined Matha Amirthanada Mai Ashram. After the bladder removal operation he couldnot urinate in a proper way. Doctor put a hole in his stomach. Through that he could pass urine. But he had no complaints on God. His trust in God helped him to recover as well as to accept all complications resulted from the surgical intervention.

4.3.1 Case 03

Mr. Ummer Abdulla was a 57 years old man who had multiple medical problems and chronic progressive pain and weakness. He felt that his faith offered the most help for coping with his illness. He lived in a village, near Kattakada, Kerala. He had seven children. His children were married. He was a good believer.

He had a medical history of hypertension and diabetes since 2007. He developed diffuse body pain. An evaluation found that he had sensory neuropathy. Initially he was treated with neurological problems. The consulting neurologist did not have any further therapy to offer him.

Mr. Ummer Abdulla continued to have diffuse body pain. He and his physician Dr. Shibi Petter continued to struggle with the lack of traditional medicine to provide him any type of better treatment. He was a man of faith. He believed that God 'Allahu' will protect him. He was admitted in Jubilee Medical Mission Hospital, Palayam, Trivandrum. He said that this hospital is Christian hospital. But they allowed him to continue his prayers. He believed that there is only one God. The treating team was always respecting his faith. The hospital authority provided a special place for him to do his prayers. It was because of their concern he selected this hospital.

4.3.2 Interpretation

Mr. Ummer Abdulla was a man of faith. In the midst of his pain he was searching God's providence. He had no complaints to God. He was always happy. He also was praying for other patients. He said that it was from this hospital he learned to pray for other patients. When he prayed for other patients God gave strength to him. All his family members were very supportive. They gave him lot of care and support. This case showed irrespective of different religious background of the hospital the patient could use his own belief system to get back to recovery.

Discussion

The religious beliefs of the patients incredibly influence the treatment process. There are several studies done in the West and in the East about religiosity of the patients. Most of the studies showed significant correlation between the faith and beliefs of the patient and recovery process. The present study also showed significant relationship between the belief system of the patients and the fast recovery process. The case studies again reveal the fact that it is not necessary that religious orientation of the hospital can affect contrary to the personal belief system of the patient. Irrespective of Catholic faith context a Muslim patient could express his belief system in the treatment process. It is also well appreciated by the medical team in general that spirituality has a significant influence in the Physical and Psychological healing process of the patients.

Conclusion

Treatment is a complicated medical process, very often depended upon scientifically proved methods either through pharmacological or surgical or both interventions. The modern science heavily depends on its own proven strategies in the application of medicine. However the age old medical treatment was closely linked with spiritual healing. The current study also proves beyond doubt that there is severe illness situation in which the modern medicine is helpless. In such occasions spiritual healing has a significant role either directly or indirectly contributing to the entire healing process. Health professionals always should take into account the influence of the religiosity and spiritual orientation of the clients and patients so that the professionals should give due weightage to spiritual aspects in the treatment process.

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