



Prayer in Iranian cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy

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Summary Chronic illnesses such as cancer are very stressful events and prayer is a valuable coping strategy for Muslim cancer patients.

This study was conducted to assess the impact of prayer in Iranian cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. A descriptive cross sectional survey was conducted on 360 cancer patients over 20 years of age who were able to read and write. Data collection employed Meraviglia's prayer questionnaire.

Mean scores of prayer activity, prayer experience and attitude toward prayer were, respectively, (94.5 ± 12.98) , (51.2 ± 7.49) and (38.2 ± 4.84) . Mean of total scores was (184.05 ± 21.67) . Significant relationships were observed between age, marital status and educational level with prayer activity, prayer experience and attitude toward prayer ($P \leq 0.001$). Also the relationship between sex and prayer activity was significant ($P \leq 0.01$).

Conclusion: Individual characteristics had an important effect on prayer. It is suggested that health care providers can augment holistic care to these patients by encouraging prayer.

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Introduction

Prayer is the natural language of religious experiences.¹ It is a spiritual and, for many, also a religious

practice.² Prayer can be generally defined as “human communication” with divine and spiritual entities.¹

Spiritual practices such as prayer have been used by individuals for every type of illness and across all age groups, cultures and religions.³

One of the largest religions in the world is Islam⁴ with Iran representing one of the biggest Islamic countries with the Muslim religion representing 99% of the population.

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Islam literally means ‘surrender’ to the will of God. It is a religion dating back to the 7th century AC when The Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H.) received revelations, described as verbal messages from God, over a 20-year period. These messages form the religious text called the Qur’an.⁵ Muslims believe in a chain of Prophets starting with Adam and ending with The Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H.).⁶ The central belief of Islam is that there is only one God and Mohammad (P.B.U.H.) is God’s Prophet. There are several branches of Islam—the Sunnites, the Shiites (with several sub-branches). Muslims have a very organized prayer life in which prayer is recited several times a day. The Qur’an is regarded as the authority of how to surrender to God’s will in different situations in life.⁷

Perception of muslims towards health and illness

Muslims believe that humans are helpless against the smallest pathogen, the Virus, and despite all the mounting research, continue to be ignorant about the cause of cancer and many other debilitating diseases. God created mankind and created a clear reminder that no matter how strong and arrogant humans become, they are still very weak in front of God, and will die one day.⁴

The worldview of Muslim patients towards health and illness incorporates the notion of receiving illness and death with patience, meditation and prayers. Muslim patients understand that illness, suffering and dying are part of life and a test from God.

Health and illness become part of the continuum of being, and prayer remains the salvation in both health and sickness. It is narrated that the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H.) said that: “The prayer of the sick person will never be rejected, until he recovers”.⁶

In illness, the awareness of God increases and Muslims becomes closer to God by realizing their own weakness. They increase their prayers because God says: “O you, who believe, seek help with steadfastness and prayer. For God is with those who are steadfast”. During this time Muslims ask forgiveness from God because they believe that God is ever forgiving. Inner peace can only be achieved by believing in God, and remembering Him frequently and asking for His help and forgiveness in times of difficulties.⁸ The Qur’an says: “Howa al-shafi” means, the curer is God⁴ and “Call on me; I will answer your prayer”.⁹

Muslim types of prayer

There are considerable prayers for Muslims in the Islamic rituals, which resolve stress and which ensure their survival in a world beset with increasing strife and conflict. There are seven tools used by Muslims. These are shown in Table 1.

Background

The diagnosis of cancer can initiate considerable distress for patients.¹² Cancer robs people of their hopes and dreams and threatens not only the patient’s physical body but also their spirit.¹³

Most cancer patients use religious and spiritual resources in response to the diagnosis of their disease. Prayer is the most commonly used religious practice.¹⁴ Prayer is a desire to communication with God/higher power or “Absolute”.¹⁵ For this study, prayer is defined as an activity and expression of the human spirit reflecting connectedness with God. Some people with cancer have found that their spirituality, particularly prayer, provides a resource to withstand their own physical and psychological crises brought on by the diagnosis

Table 1 The seven tools, utilized by muslims.

1. The Salat, a daily recurring ritual has been shown to lessen stress and the cause of a feeling of “lightness” and relief.⁴
2. Recitation of Quran, has healing effect on body, mind, and heart. Quran says: “Does the remembrance of God not bring tranquility to the hearts? (Minds)”⁸ Quran has a direct healing effect on the various systems of the human body.¹⁰
3. Increased Zikr (remembrance of God). God says in Quran: “who have believed and whose heart have rest in the remembrance of God. Verify in the remembrance of God, do hearts find rest”.
4. Asma-al-hosna, which are Ninety nine names of God. Repetition of these names solve specific problems according to the holy names.
5. Social structure of Islam: Islam is a way of life rather than a religion and all its aspects are conducive to lessen stress, doubt, and indecision. Islam has the unique and complete answer to resolve and prevent stress, as well as prevention and treatment of illnesses.⁴
6. Many Muslims go to mosques and this is an important feature of their lives. It is a place for individual and communal prayer.¹¹
7. Special prayers with special names for special goals.⁴

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