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Issues post-stroke for Muslim people in maintaining the practice of *salat* (prayer): A qualitative study

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Summary

Background: Muslims throughout the world perform *salat* (prayer) five times a day; *salat* involves a person reciting the Holy Qur'an while being in several positions. There are several steps that should be carried out before prayer, including *wudhu* (ablution) and covering one's *awrah* (body).

Objectives: To identify educational needs for stroke patients and their caregivers in Malaysia. Another purpose is to report on the needs identified by stroke patients and their families related to *salat*.

Methods: Descriptive qualitative study. Phase 1 involved semi-structured interviews with stroke patients ($n=5$), family caregivers ($n=5$) and health professionals ($n=12$) in Kelantan Malaysia. Phase 2 involved presenting the findings from Phase 1 to the health professionals with the aim of establishing priorities and processes to develop education strategies for stroke patients and their families.

Results: Preparing for and performing *salat* was challenging for both patient and family carers to do following a stroke. Themes identified were prayer and the meaning of the stroke events for participants, difficulties praying post-stroke, prayer as part of rehabilitation therapy.

Conclusion: Providing culturally safe care should include how nurses assess and support patients and their caregivers post stroke to meet their prayer needs. Nurses have a role in discussing with stroke patients and their families how in addition to its spiritual and customary benefits, prayer and for Muslims reciting the Holy Qur'an can have cognitive and rehabilitation benefits, as well as being a source of psychological support for stroke patients.

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Introduction

Internationally, stroke or cerebral vascular accident is a leading cause of severe disability. For many people who have had a stroke the level of disability impacts on their daily activities (Boughton & Halliday, 2009; Knight, Worrall, & Rose, 2006; Mitchell, 2009; Pierce et al., 2006). Nurses have a key role in supporting and helping stroke patients maximise their ability to overcome this disability and to perform daily activities. Identifying and providing such support requires culturally safe and competent care (Andrews et al., 2010; Duke, Connor, & McEldowney, 2009; McEldowney & Connor, 2011). This paper reports on research designed to uncover the educational needs of patients and families post-stroke in Malaysia, which found Muslim stroke patients' needs related to *salat* (prayer) were central to their lives. The Holy Qur'an and *hadith* (the utterance, action or indirect approval of an act by Prophet Muhammad) state that it is the duty of every Muslim to perform *salat*.

No published research was found on the physical and mental requirements of performing *salat* for people who have had a stroke. Muslims are the second largest non-Christian religious group in Australia and the second fastest growing religious group since the 2001 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). While the paper draws specifically on Muslims and prayer (*salat*), the findings have implications for how nurses generally should think about prayer as part of providing culturally appropriate and safe acute and rehabilitation stroke services.

Salat prayer in Muslim society

The way *salat* is performed by Muslims is similar all over the world. It can be performed in groups or individually and requires no equipment. *Salat*, one of five pillars of Islam, consists of five prayers (*Fajr*, *Zuhr*, *Asr*, *Maghrib* and *Isha'a*), each being undertaken at a different time of the day. *Fajr* is performed before the light of dawn, *Zuhr* when the sun starts to decline from its zenith, *Asr* in the afternoon, *Maghribat* at sunset, and *Isha'a* in the evening. *Salat* involves a person reciting the Holy Qur'an while being in several positions, and for people who have had a stroke, undertaking this five times a day can be difficult because of the preparation required and the postures utilised while undertaking prayer.

The first preparatory step is performing *wudhu* (ablution). The particular method individuals use for *wudhu* is influenced by their health and recent sexual activity. The Holy Qur'an states

...when you intend to offer the prayer, wash your faces and your hands (forearms) up to the elbows, rub (by passing wet hands over) your heads, and (wash) your feet up to ankles. If you are in state of Janaba (i.e. had a sexual discharge), purify yourself (bathe your whole body). But if you are ill or on a journey or any of you come from answering the call of nature, or you have been in contact with women (i.e. sexual intercourse) and you find no water, then perform *Tayammum* with clean earth and rub there with your faces and hands. (Al-Maidah 5-6)

The paralysis or weakness associated with stroke means that many stroke patients need assistance in carrying this

out. Providing this assistance can be complicated as men and women should not normally have skin contact with each other at this time. Assistance from others of the same gender is therefore necessary. A second step requires people to cover their *awrah* (bodies). For a woman this involves covering her entire body except for her face and hands, while a man only needs to cover between his navel and knees. Again paralysis or weakness can limit a person's ability to do this unaided. Worshippers usually wear loose garments for prayer, as this allows them to move freely.

Salat involves a person being in a series of positions while reciting the Holy Qur'an. Firstly people position themselves to face the *Ka'bah* in Mecca. They then simultaneously recite specific prayers (commencing with the *Takbiratul ihram* [the statement of "Allahu Akbar"]) while moving through set positions which include standing with the palms of the hands joined, reciting verses from the Holy Qur'an while simultaneously being in a *ruku'* (bowing) position, rising from *ruku'* into the *i'tidal* (standing) position, and as each cycle of prayer (*raka'ah*) is complete prostrating twice. People who have had a stroke can have difficulty with either or both the recital aspect and the physical aspect of praying. There is an expectation that as long as a Muslim person is conscious and alert and without altered mental status (e.g. mental illness), they should try to perform prayer. However, Allah's teachings say that where there is difficulty there is flexibility in performing prayer depending on the person's condition.

The spiritual (*rohaniah*) benefits of praying are stated in the Holy Qur'an and in the *hadith*. *Salat* also provides physical and mental wellbeing (Rezaei et al., 2008). Rezaei et al. confirm what is commonly understood by Muslims, namely that illness or disease is a test to increase devotion to Allah. Praying is therefore in line with one of the Islamic principles, namely to look after the body. Muslims believe in *Al-Qadar* which means that everything occurs according to the will of Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala (Allah SWT), the God of most high. These occurrences include any health, illness or suffering experienced by individuals, and even dying (Rassool, 2000). Accordingly, Muslims accept that stroke happens because of the will of Allah SWT.

Literature review

The literature related to prayer and health is extensive and covers spirituality, belief systems, practices and the benefits for improving and restoring health (Benson et al., 2006; Bryan, Nanda, & Vannemreddy, 2009; Hermann, 2001; Hughes, 1997; McCaffrey et al., 2004; Narayanasamy & Narayanasamy, 2008; Tzeng & Yin, 2008). What is mainly known about prayer and health concerns crisis events, mental health and terminal care, with little known about its role in rehabilitation. It is known that the benefits of prayer for non-Muslim patients post-stroke include assisting recovery, promoting general wellbeing, aiding coping and providing some relief of the burden caused by stroke (Robinson-Smith, 2002). However, the purpose and activity of praying is different for people with different religions (O'Mathuna, 1999). For stroke patients who are Muslim, the ability to perform the daily rituals of *salat* (prayer) and *hajat* (intercessory prayer), reciting the Holy Qur'an can be disrupted because of the impact of the stroke.

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