

Culturally competent care is contingent on knowledge of the unique values and attributes of diverse communities. This article focuses on Islamic perspectives of suffering and meaning in illness as they relate to cancer care. Personal narrative and evidence-based information are integrated to inform a holistic nursing approach to the care of Muslim patients, particularly when supporting them and their families through suffering in the context of malignancy or significant illness.

#### AT A GLANCE

- For Muslim patients, the teachings of Islam offer ways to accept and find meaning in pain and suffering experienced through illness.
- Understanding Muslim beliefs about illness and medical treatment can help oncology nurses support patients and families through suffering in the context of malignancy or significant illness.
- Awareness of cultural and religious practices, including prayer, modesty, cleanliness, and diet, can help nurses provide holistic care to Muslim patients and families.

#### KEYWORDS

Islamic perspective; Muslim patients; cancer; cancer care; cultural practices

#### DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/18.CJON.573-575

# An Islamic Perspective

## Suffering and meaning in cancer

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Understanding the unique cultural practices and health beliefs of different populations is important to providing culturally sensitive, evidence-based care. When caring for Muslim patients and their families, addressing needs related to privacy and modesty, dietary needs, and spiritual support is fundamental to integrating Muslim cultural practices into the context of cancer care (Mataoui & Kennedy Sheldon, 2016). An estimated 3.45 million Muslim individuals were living in the United States in 2017, representing diversity in race, country of origin, and sociodemographics (Pew Research Center, 2017). In the context of cultural and religious considerations, Muslim patient care has been explored concerning cancer screening (Lofters, Slater, & Vahabi, 2018), active treatment (Rasheed et al., 2017), advanced illness (Boucher, Siddiqui, & Koenig, 2017), and palliative care (Al-Shahri, 2016; Al-Shahri & Al-Khenaizan, 2005). Personal narrative and evidence-based information are integrated in this article to inform a holistic nursing approach to the care of the Muslim population, particularly when supporting patients and their families through suffering in the context of malignancy or significant illness.

#### Islamic Views

As an Abrahamic faith, Islam shares aspects of belief and practice with other faiths that have a person's relationship with God as a primary focus. Islam emphasizes worshipping God with love, devotion,

and gratitude, and living according to His guidance. God is seen as the cherisher and sustainer of all creation. Muslims believe the events that happen in a person's life are part of God's plan to nurture and develop him or her and that each challenge comes with opportunity for benefit and spiritual growth. Illness and suffering are seen as part of the human condition by God's design, but Islam does not view illness itself as either good or bad. Rather, illness is seen as a state prescribed by God that has the potential to bring a person closer to Him.

Muslims are encouraged to seek treatment for illness and relief from distress. However, when pain or illness remains after treatment options have been exhausted, Muslims believe there is wisdom behind this. Part of a Muslim's approach to accepting the pain and suffering that exist in the world is accepting that God has reasons for what happens and trusting in this wisdom. The Prophet Muhammad taught that, for believers, all the conditions they face are good and offer opportunity for benefit. If believers are in prosperity and are grateful, they are rewarded by God for their gratitude. If they are in hardship and remain patient, they are rewarded for their patience (Al-Shahri, 2016). Therefore, all situations are good for people of faith. In fact, Islamic teachings state that God tests the people He loves most with more difficult hardships (Al-Shahri, 2016). However, not everyone will benefit from the experience of suffering; some will become bitter and reject God. Benefiting from hardship is not a given but an opportunity,