
Should Religion Interfere With Medicine?

Medicine and religion have intertwined since people started trying to understand cure illnesses. Humans did not at first think of death and disease as natural phenomena. Common illnesses such as colds were accepted as part of life and were mostly dealt with by using herbal remedies. However, serious and disabling diseases were treated very differently. These were considered to be of supernatural origin. They might be the result of a spell cast on the victim by a evil spirit, for example a demon, or they were the work of an angered god who had either projected some object into the body of the victim or had extracted something, usually the soul of the person. The treatment applied in these cases was to lure the escaped soul back to the body or to extract the evil intruder by counterspells, chants, potions, suction or other magical means. Most of these method, of course, did not work but they were a first good example of how religion and beliefs can intervene in medicine. Even though religion and medicine used to go together, there is a big question of whether or not they should still be connected in curing illnesses.

Both aspects should be considered when answering this question. On one hand, religion can have a good effect by making people more hopeful when facing deadly illnesses. On the other hand, religion can have a bad effect on medical practices by preventing a person from receiving the medical treatment that they need because of their beliefs. This includes, being against abortions even if the mother's life is in danger and in the cases with Jehovah witnesses, not accepting blood transfusion.

In this essay i am going to write about whether medicine and religion should mix or not. On one hand, religion can have a positive influence on medicine. Religion can help people stay hopeful when facing deadly and awful illnesses.

In these situations many people can crumble under the possibility of them dying. This is when people ask themselves why me? Will i be missed? What will happen after i die? Will anyone remember me? And this can spiral to people falling into depression. This is when religion comes into play. Terminal patients may find comfort in their beliefs when facing death. For example, in a survey conducted by the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology showed that when asked what helped them cope with their gynecologic cancer, 93% of the 108 women asked believed that the religious devotion they had helped sustain their hopes. In addition, 75% of these patients stated that religion had a significant place in their lives and 49% said they had become more spiritual after their diagnosis whereas no one became less religious.

In another survey made by the Journal of General Internal Medicine, among the 90 HIV-positive patients that were questioned, those who were spiritually active had less fear of death and less guilt. Out of these 90 patients, 17% possessed a living will, 44% of patients felt guilty about their HIV infection, 32% expressed fear of death and 26% felt their disease was some form of punishment. Fear of death was more likely in those who perceived HIV as punishment or felt guilty about having HIV and less likely in those who read the Bible frequently or attended church regularly.

Religion can also have a good effect on medicine because some religions emphasize the

importance of caring for the diseased even at the risk of one's own death. Penn State evolutionary biologist David Hughes and colleagues surveyed religious attitudes among the people of Malawi where AIDS became the leading cause of death among adults. They found that 30% of people who described themselves as Christians visited the sick, in contrast to 7% of Muslims. They also found that in the last 5 years, about 400 of the 3000 respondents changed religions, mostly to Christianity.

Religion can also help with pain relief. Results of a pain questionnaire distributed by the American Pain Society to hospitalized patients showed that personal prayer was the most commonly used non drug method of controlling pain: 76% of the patients used prayer to relieve pain. In this study, prayer as a method of pain management was used more frequently than IV infusion pain medication (66%), pain injections (62%), relaxation methods (33%), touch (19%), and massage (9%).

There are studies that suggest the idea that religious people are healthier because they engage in healthy lifestyles in correspondence with their religious beliefs. This perceived religious influence on health behavior may include avoiding behaviors such as drinking alcohol, risky sexual behaviors, using illegal drugs or tobacco use.

It can be argued that religious beliefs can prevent the patient from receiving the care that they need and even though this does happen it is not always the case. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church absolutely acknowledges that vaccination is the main way to achieve progress and encourages people to vaccinate. The Russian Orthodox Church condemns anti-vaccination promotion and forbids the distribution of anti-vaccination literature and audio or video material in its monasteries and temples.

On the other hand, religion interfering with medicine can cause very big problems. As i previously mentioned, religious beliefs of an individual can stop them from getting the proper medical treatment that they need.

For example, Jehovah's witnesses, who are a branch of Christianity with about 8,579,909 followers around the world, refuse blood transfusion. They do this because they believe that the Bible prohibits ingesting blood and that Christians should not accept blood transfusions or donate or store their own blood for transfusion. This, of course, is not good and can cause problems for both the doctors and the patient. A study by Craig S. Kitchen: „Are transfusions overrated? Surgical outcome of Jehovah's Witnesses” was based on 1404 “bloodless” surgeries performed on Jehovah's Witnesses. The study showed that 1.4% of these patients died to a lack of blood as either a primary or contributing cause of their death. In order words, this means that every time a Jehovah's witness had “bloodless surgery” their chance of death was 1.4% greater due to refusing blood. This may not sound like a big number but considering that there are about 8 and a half million Jehovah's witnesses around the world the number of possible deaths gets drastically bigger.

Another example of people refusing medical treatment because of their religion are Christian Scientists. Christian Scientists refuse most medical treatment because they rely on the healing prayers of Christian Scientist practitioners. Christian Scientists believe that the primary method of healing should be through prayer and many members are against modern medical treatments. There have been measles outbreaks among Christian Scientists, the worst one being in 1994 in Missouri and Illinois. Studies have shown that mortality levels were high

amongst christian scientists. The higher death rate among Christian Scientists was reported by a scientist named William Franklin Simpson on the faculty of Emporia State University who compared the life span over the last 50 years of graduates from a Christian Science college with that of people attending a public university. He found that the death rate among Principia graduates from cancer was double the national average and that 6 percent of the overall deaths of Principia graduates were due to causes generally regarded as preventable by orthodox medicine.

Some Catholics believe that during intercourse condoms or other preservatives should not be used. Catholics usually call back on the *Humanae vitae* which is an encyclical written by Pope Paul VI, dated on the 25th of July 1968. The text was issued at a Vatican press conference and it reaffirmed the orthodox teaching of the Catholic Church regarding marriage, responsible parenthood and the rejection of artificial contraception. Many Christians see abortion as something to be looked down upon and as something that is morally wrong. This can be a issue because an unexpected or unwanted pregnancy can seriously damage the mother's health in some cases. This also implies that the life of the unborn and undeveloped embryo is more important than the mothers which is extremely toxic and unfair towards the woman.

Parents often choose their children's medical treatment according to their beliefs and it can be argued that parents who refuse treatment have the right to practice their religious beliefs but refusal of necessary medical treatment constitutes child abuse and neglect of their child under the 1974 federal Child Abuse and Treatment Act.

In Serbia often religion does not interfere with medicine. The main religion in Serbia is Orthodox Christianity which is mostly for using modern medicine. The only aspects where religion and medicine may clash in Serbia is in regards to abortion. The attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the issue of abortion is identical to the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church, which on its website published a statement that Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Kiril, signed a public petition for the adoption of anti-abortion laws in Russia.

The Serbian Orthodox Church would support such a petition, if this document does not only offer restrictive measures but it also provides hope and an alternative to women who have a dilemma on this issue. If the Church would be able to provide support to future mothers through various counseling centers and educational seminars.

In 2013 the Serbian Orthodox Church supported the initiative of religious doctors of who are demanding the ban on deliberate termination of pregnancy. This caused an outrage within the medical sphere in Serbia. Drasko Karađinović, from the Doctors Against Corruption Organization, states that the right of women to decide on birth is unquestionable.

Drasko Karađinović also stated that : 'There are doctors who are believers, there are doctors that are atheists and there are doctors who are agnostics, right? Everyone has the right to their free opinion but you can not just impose something as a legal obligation because you have a certain attitude towards that something.'

The Minister of Health Slavica Djukić Dejanović also responded to the statement of the Serbian Orthodox Church, saying that the issue of abortion was regulated by law and not the Church even though she herself is religious.

The Serbian Orthodox church usually follows the principles of the Russian Church and so they agree with the Russian Churches stav about vaccines. The attitude of the Church is that children should be vaccinated, but that parents should be well informed about the nature of the vaccine. This was stated by Patriarch Irinej, the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

He stated that: „I think that all that medicine offers should be accepted because it wants to help those who need help of this kind,' The Orthodox Church also support the transplant of organs under the conditions that both parties agreed beforehand. Patriarch Irinej stated that: „Bearing in mind the words of Christ written in the Gospel that there is no greater love than that one should give life for his near one,' pointing out that the transplantation of healthy organs to the sick is a great act of angelic love and that the Church does not mind .

Personally, i believe that religion and medicine should mix to some extent. Religion can have positive effects on the patient and their family in the context of giving people more hope when they truly need it. In stressful and hard times everybody needs somebody to lean on and something to believe in. In context of people believing that once they or their loved ones die they go to a better place and that helping them overcome their sorrow even a little bit, religion can have a good influence and should not be totally separated from the medical sphere.

Of course there is another side of religion interfering with medicine that is not so good. There are cases when religion stops a person from getting the medical treatment that they or their child need and this is not good. I believe that religion could have a good influence on medicine but also that medicine should not be disrupted by religion.

As religion interfering with medicine is not a common occurrence i believe that this will not be a major issue in the future. But in the cases where it is a issue i think that the proper response would be medical experts and the government reacting in the interest of the patients who want to get better rather than the churches wishes. In reality, in most countries the church does not have a big influence over the medical field which is a good thing in situations where the interests of the two spheres clash.

In conclusion, religion should mix with medicine but only to a small extent. This includes being spiritual support for patients rather than interfering with medical treatment directly. Religion and personal beliefs can be great when used a pomocno sredstvo when the patients stars losing hope or starts falling into depression but religion should not be in the centre of medical practice as it may disturb some of its performances that may save someone's life.

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