Diversity of faith: the healthcare context

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**Abstract**

The primary objective in this paper is to determine the role of religious diversity in the sphere of health care. Patients belonging to different religions adhere to different belief systems and these belief systems play a crucial role in determining the outcomes of the treatment regimes. This paper is going to emphasis on such influences by comparing and contrasting two religions – Christianity and Buddhism. Such comparison and contrast is going to reveal why it is always important of nurses to respect diversity and to treat each patient as unique individual having unique needs and belief systems that are different from others.

**Diversity of Faith: The Healthcare Context**

The sphere of healthcare is infused with the principle of diversity. There are people serving the industry who belong to different racial, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and all these diversities, in a cohesive manner, act for the betterment of the realm of healthcare. Religious beliefs play a major role in relating adherents of different religions to the concept of healing and they are also very much important in respect of understanding more about the relationship between religious philosophies and the modes of treating an individual suffering from an ailment. Prayers, belief in God, etc, are factors which play a crucial role in linking religion with clinical approaches. In different religions the aspect of medical treatment has been dealt and interpreted in a different manner but despite of having such differences, a basic similarity can be found existing between these different religions and this similarity denotes that human health has been emphasized as one of the most valuable treasures which must be sustained and protected from deterioration through the means of divine and medical interventions. But despite of having such similarity, it must be noted that religious traditions are complex and they are long, and as it is impossible to predict how a particular religion’s adherent (who is the patient) and his/her family members might understand or apply religious principles in the context of healthcare, it is better for healthcare and nursing practitioners to have sufficient knowledge about the diversified religious ideologies related to the sphere of healthcare.

As stated earlier, in the context of healthcare, diversity is a truth and to uphold this philosophy of diversity healthcare providers “should encourage patients and family members to interpret how religious/cultural values may be pertinent to a hospital stay – regarding personal needs, interaction with staff, and decisions about treatment” (Ehman, 2012). This provision is necessary to ensure proper interaction between nursing practitioners and other medical staffs with the patients and their family members and this is also necessary to promote patients’ trust on the healthcare system as a whole. To emphasize more on the need of understanding the different ideologies and worldviews (related to healthcare and medical treatment) prevailing in the domain of different religions two different religions must be emphasized – Christianity and Buddhism. Going through the different aspects of these religions it can be ascertained how religion influences the healthcare ideologies.

**Christianity**

In Christianity the divine intervention in the purpose of healing has been thoroughly emphasized. Christianity believes that as human beings are created in the image of God, the Almighty has the most important role to play to determine the ways through which an individual can get rid of his/her sufferings in the form of ailments.

**Spiritual Perspective on Healing**

Christianity advocates the need of God’s intervention in every aspect of human life including the aspect of getting healed. This religious view suggests that human beings were created in the image of God and not only God did create human beings with the physical bodies, He “personally incarnated into a physical body, healed physical bodies, was resurrected with a physical body and gave the gifts of healing physical bodies to His disciples and to His church. He will yet redeem our mortal physical bodies transforming them into an immortal body” (Elder, 2000). Christianity preaches the doctrine of multipurpose healing to actually accomplish the objective of healing in the true sense and that is the reason why Christians believe that spirituality is the greatest contributor to the wellbeing of a human being. It must also be noted that in the sphere of Christianity “Sacraments and blessings by a Catholic priest are highly important, especially before surgery or whenever there is a perceived risk of death. The sacramental requests most often made by patients are for “Sacrament of the Sick” (what some Catholics may think of as “Last Rites”), Confession, and Holy Communion (Eucharist) – the latter, however, does not have to offered by a priest but may be offered by an authorized lay Catholic Eucharist Minister” (Ehman, 2012).So, it can be seen that the intervention of the Divine and the Church is seen to be the most important spiritual aspect of healing.

**Critical Components of Healing**

There are several different components of healing including physical, mental, and spiritual, and Christianity believes that “Healing requires healing of the physical, mental, emotional, social and religious facets as well as healing of the spiritual; it requires restoration of the “image of God.” Healing occurs only in community, without community healing is incomplete. God gifted His Church with many gifts, including the gifts of healing. He appointed His Church to be Communities of Healing ministering physical, emotional, social, religious and spiritual healing. Churches are to be communities that call (give vocation to) individuals to heal as their ministry” (Elder, 2000). Hence, it can be seen that in Christianity even though all the components of healing have been emphasized, the spiritual component has been given a bit greater importance. Christianity condemns processes like abortion – a process which has grown into a rampant one in the context of U.S healthcare system. Even though there is no clear mentioning of abortion in the moral teachings of the New Testament, “The Roman Catholic Church believes that the fetus is a full human being, with a right to live, from the moment of conception; therefore this church has condemned all direct acts of abortion” (Soleimani, 2005). In respect of euthanasia too, Christians show aversion and Christianity has thoroughly condemned euthanasia on the basis of rejecting “consequentialist patterns of justification and espouse a ‘sanctity of life’ position which precludes the intentional destruction of human life by act or omission” (Keown & Keown, 1995).

**Recommendations for Health Care Providers**

Christian patients often are willing to meet a priest while in hospital. This strengthens their belief of getting well soon. Health care provider must give respect to such spiritual component of the healing process and they must try to arrange for such meeting. Health care providers must ensure that the concerned Christian patients who are wishing to receive Holy Communion are provided with it on a regular basis during the tenure of their stay in hospital. Moreover, health care providers must keep in mind that “Anointing with oil is a very important aspect of Catholic patient’s care and this together with confession may be sought before an operation or if a patient deteriorates” (“Respecting the Religious and Cultural needs of patients”, n.d.).

**Buddhism**

Buddhism is a religion which is ingrained with philosophical principles encompassing metaphysical components. It is a religion whose primary objective is to pave the way for human beings to put an end to their sufferings and attend Nirvana, and this religion believes that every suffering of human beings, including ailments, are due to the earthly desires and mundane attachments.

**Spiritual Perspective of Healing**

For Buddhism, spirituality is the most important healing force. It must be noted that “The Buddhist ‘Path of Life’ offers prescriptions for the ethical and spiritual well-being of each individual and exhorts them to develop Wisdom and have Compassion towards all forms of life” (Harvey, 2006). It is through spirituality, according to Buddhism, that human health cane be ensured and his/her sufferings can be minimized. Buddhism preaches that the process of healing is dependable on the faith of the three greatest aspects of Buddhism – the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha – the ‘Three Refuges’ or the ‘Three Jewels’ (Harvey, 2006).

**Critical Components of Healing**

In Buddhism all existences are considered in term of integrated factors which depend on processes of inter-dependent causal relationships and these relationships are governed by the theory of Dependent Origination (Paonil & Sringernyuang, 2002). It must be noted in this regard that, “The broadest meaning of disease in Buddhism involves all kinds of human sufferings, while health is the state of being completely free from all suffering. Health quality is a collaborative product of previous actions starting from past lives and ending at your last second” (Paonil & Sringernyuang, 2002). To different phenomena related to healthcare, Buddhists possess different views. But in terms of euthanasia the Buddhism, just like Christianity, play the role of a critic. Just like Christianity, Buddhism also condemns euthanasia on the basis of the ‘sanctity of life’ position (Keown & Keown, 1995). Moreover, just like Christianity, Buddhism also condemns abortion because abortion involves “the deliberate destroying of a life” (“Abortion”, 2009).

**Recommendations for Health Care Providers**

Majority of Buddhist patients are vegetarians and they prefer several days of fasting (“Respecting the Religious and Cultural needs of patients”, n.d.). Health care providers must ascertain whether such patients are willing to carry on with such processes and then they must make them understand why such process can be detrimental for the treatment session. Moreover, as Buddhists appreciate peaceful and quiet atmosphere ideal for meditation, health care providers must look after that such needs are fulfilled and as Buddhist patients except visits from other Buddhists (“Respecting the Religious and Cultural needs of patients”, n.d.), such opportunities should also be provided by health care providers.

**Diversity of Worldview**

Different religions have different worldviews. Worldview “is a theory of the world, used for living in the world. A world view is a mental model of reality – a framework of ideas & attitudes about the world, ourselves, and life, a comprehensive system of beliefs – with answers for a wide range of questions” (“What is a worldview? – Definition & Introduction”, n.d.).

**Different Views**

Christians and Buddhists project some differences in their worldviews. Both the Christian and Buddhist worldviews give much emphasis on the concept of God and spirituality. Christianity believes that the independent personal experience between the individual and God is the primary aspect of life and that all things on this earth “are second to this and are to be used as a goal of achieving the ascension of the individual soul to God” (Alves, n.d.). But Buddhism differs in respect of such view. Buddhists see an interconnection between each and every aspect of life and they believe that there is always an existence of a causal relationship (Alves, n.d.). This stance explains “the Buddhist mind-set of duty and commitment to all things in nature both animate and non-animate objects; as opposed to those of the Christian mind-set of the individuality concept of the self and the attainment of personal connection to God’s grace” (Alves, n.d.). Moreover, it must be noted that while the Buddhists see the individual as the redeemer of suffering, the Christians view of an external God as the redeemer of human beings’ sufferings (Alves, n.d.).

**Similar Views**

Even though it might seem that there are differences between the Christian and Buddhist worldviews, in terms of the true meaning of God, similarities of worldviews can be observed. It can be interesting to learn that both Christianity and Buddhism teach that “God is unknowable and unfathomable, beyond all words and all descriptions” (“The Lotus and the Cross: Common Threads in Christian and Buddhist Spirituality”, n.d.). God is, as per Buddhism (showing similarities with Christianity) is the “Uncreated” – “an absolute Reality which is everywhere present, but beyond this perceived world, resulting from no cause, and limited by no conditions” (“The Lotus and the Cross: Common Threads in Christian and Buddhist Spirituality”, n.d.).

**Implications for Nursing**

Going through all the different aspects of two different religions it must be said that nurses should be aware of the fact that a patient’s religious views and beliefs play a crucial role in determining his/her health status and the treatment process’ effectiveness which, to a great extent, is determined by the patient’s faith on the process, are thoroughly influenced by the concerned patient’s religious beliefs. Nurses must understand that different patients belonging to different religion background adhere to different belief systems and such systems play a crucial role in determining the success and failure of the treatment process and so, nurses must try to respect this diversity, address the diversified needs of patients of different religions, and they must avert to treat different patients belonging to different religions in the same manner. This might negatively affect on the treatment outcomes.

**Conclusion**

Religious traditions are complex and they are long, and as it is impossible to predict how a particular religion’s adherent (who is the patient) and his/her family members might understand or apply religious principles in the context of healthcare, it is better for healthcare and nursing practitioners to have sufficient knowledge about the diversified religious ideologies related to the sphere of healthcare. Different belief systems and such systems play a crucial role in determining the success and failure of the treatment process and so, nurses must try to respect this diversity, address the diversified needs of patients of different religions, and they must avert to treat different patients belonging to different religions in the same manner. This might negatively affect on the treatment outcomes.

*A very good paper, Chisom. I am wondering if you feel you adequately represent Christianity in your analysis and discussion without mentioning Jesus Christ, the cross or the atonement (see my Week 3 class announcement). Christians believe that Christ is the Son of God, which warrants some examination in your paper. Also, Christians believe that Christ is active in the present, in their own lives. Thus, we can see how vital Jesus Christ is to Christianity.*

*So, please integrate my comments into your final version of this paper, as well as the comments of your peer reviewer.*

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