



## FAITH HEALING; MODERN HEALTH CARE

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**ABSTRACT... Objectives:** To observe the frequency and various modes of faith / spiritual healing adopted by patients admitted with surgical diseases and their effects on course of disease. **Study design:** Prospective, observational. **Setting:** Surgical Department Aziz Bhatti Shaheed (Teaching) Hospital Gujrat, & Surgical department Islam Medical & Dental College Sialkot. Duration of study: January 2013 to June 2013. **Material & Methods:** Patients of both sex and all age groups admitted surgical wards of in both study setting during the study period were included in the study. Unattended/non cooperative and patients with trauma were excluded. Their surgical problems were evaluated and recorded. Various techniques of spiritual/ faith healing being adopted by the patients either as primary or /and an adjuvant modality were noted and resulted formulated. **Results:** A total of 953 patients with surgical problems were admitted in both study settings. 788 patients (82.68%) were found to be using one or another technique of faith /spiritual healing as a primary or/ and an adjuvant to medical treatment. Out of total 788 patients 414 (52.53%) were female, no much difference of adaptation of various spiritual/faith healing was found in literate and illiterate population. This practice of adopting spiritual/faith healing was more common in rural population (n=493 62.56%). **Conclusions:** Trust on faith/spiritual healing techniques is a common phenomenon in society, but it is a commonest known reason of late presentation, diagnosis, treatment of the diseases leading to poor outcome. One must trust Allah, and it is consistent to apply every remedy that comes with in the range of one's knowledge, and then to ask Allah to sanctify that application to the healing of ailment. Religious scholars, electronic as well as print media can play a vital role in making people aware of this fact that will eventually lead to early diagnosis, treatment and better outcome of various body ailments.

**Key words:** Faith healing; Spiritual Healing; Ruqya.

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### INTRODUCTION

The technological advances of the past century tended to change the focus of medicine from a curing, service oriented model to a technological, cure oriented model. Technology has led to phenomenal advances in medicine and has given us the ability to decrease the morbidity and improve the outcome.

The notion that prayer, divine intervention or the ministrations of an individual healer can cure illness has been popular throughout history. Miraculous recoveries have been attributed to a myriad of techniques commonly lumped together

as "faith healing"<sup>1</sup>.

Faith healing is through spiritual means. Believers assert that healing of a person can brought about by religious faith through prayers and/or rituals that stimulate a divine presence and power toward correcting disease and disability.

Faith healing involve prayer, a visit to a religious shrine, or simply a strong belief in a supreme being<sup>1,2</sup>.

The term is best known in connection with Christianity. Some people interpret the Bible,

especially the New Testament, as teaching belief in, and practice of, faith healing. There have been claims that faith can cure blindness, deafness, cancer, AIDS, developmental disorders, anemia, arthritis, corns, defective speech, multiple sclerosis, skin rashes, paralysis and various injuries<sup>3</sup>.

The American Cancer states “available scientific evidence does not support claims that faith healing can actually cure physical ailments.”<sup>3</sup> “Death, disability, and other unwanted outcomes have occurred when faith healing was elected instead of medical care for serious illnesses or injuries<sup>3</sup>”.

Unlike faith healing, advocates of spiritual healing make no attempt to seek divine intervention, instead believing in divine energy. The increased interest in alternative medicine at the end of the twentieth century has given rise to a parallel interest among sociologists in relationship of religion to health<sup>1</sup>.

We being Muslims, having firm belief in Allah and the preaching's of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him), know that Allah has made cure for every illness, in addition to firm faith on Allah. In Holy Quran, it is narrated “And when I am sick, then he restores me to health” Surah Shurah Verse 80, Chapter 19. So we must find out and adopt various treatment modalities available for a particular illness, and then prey to Allah for cure.

In Pakistan, being health care providers, we are seeing number of the patients being adapting only, one or other form of faith healing techniques like Dam & Darood, visit to a shrine, taaweez, wearing of a holy necklace/ rope etc., for cure of their ailments. It has been observed that this practice is a one of major factor of late presentation of patients especially of various malignancies leading to increased morbidity and mortality. In present study we are presenting our experience of patients with surgical diseases who adopt some sort of “faith healing” techniques for cure of their ailments.

## MATERIAL & METHODS

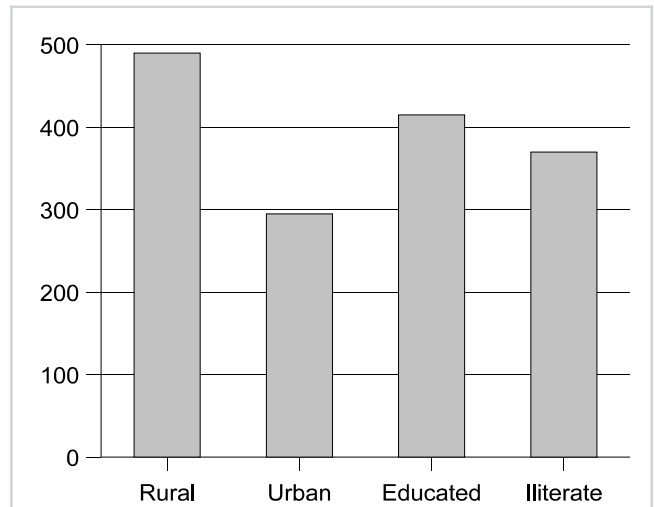
This prospective descriptive study conducted during the January 2013 to June 2013 in Surgical Teaching Unit of Aziz Bhatti Shaheed Hospital (ABSH) Gujrat and surgical department of Islam Medical & Dental College Sialkot. ABSH is a teaching hospital affiliated with Nawaz Sharif Medical College, University of Gujrat. Department of Surgery at ABSH Gujrat is recognized department for Fellowship in General Surgery. Islam Medical College is a newly established private medical college in Sialkot. A total of 953 patients with surgical problems admitted in surgical wards of both study settings were included and interviewed. Patients of all age groups and gender were included. Unattended / unknown / non cooperative and patients with trauma were excluded from the study. In case of minor or patient with altered conscious level parents/attendants were the source of history/information. Various surgical problems were classified in to different groups like breast diseases, vascular diseases, perianal diseases, lumps & bumps, ulcers etc. Literacy, socioeconomic level, religious believes, availability of treatment facility, type of healing faith, technique of faith healing and the satisfaction level of the patient on adapted faith healing technique were inquired and recorded in a performa. Data compiled, analyzed and results were formulated.

## RESULTS

A total of 788 patients were included in the study and interviewed from January 2013 to June 2013. Patients of all age group were included. Out of total 788 patients, 414 (52.53%) were female whereas 374 (47.31%) were male. 493 patients (62.56%) were from rural areas of Gujrat whereas 295 (37.43%) were from urban area. Breakup of patients with reference to age and sex distribution is given in Table-I.

Age range years	Number	%age	Male	Female
1-10	59	07.4	31	28
11-20	71	09.0	53	18
21-30	87	11.09	39	48
31-40	93	11.80	29	64
41-50	109	13.83	47	62
51-60	154	19.54	81	73
61-70	121	15.35	63	58
>70	94	11.92	31	63

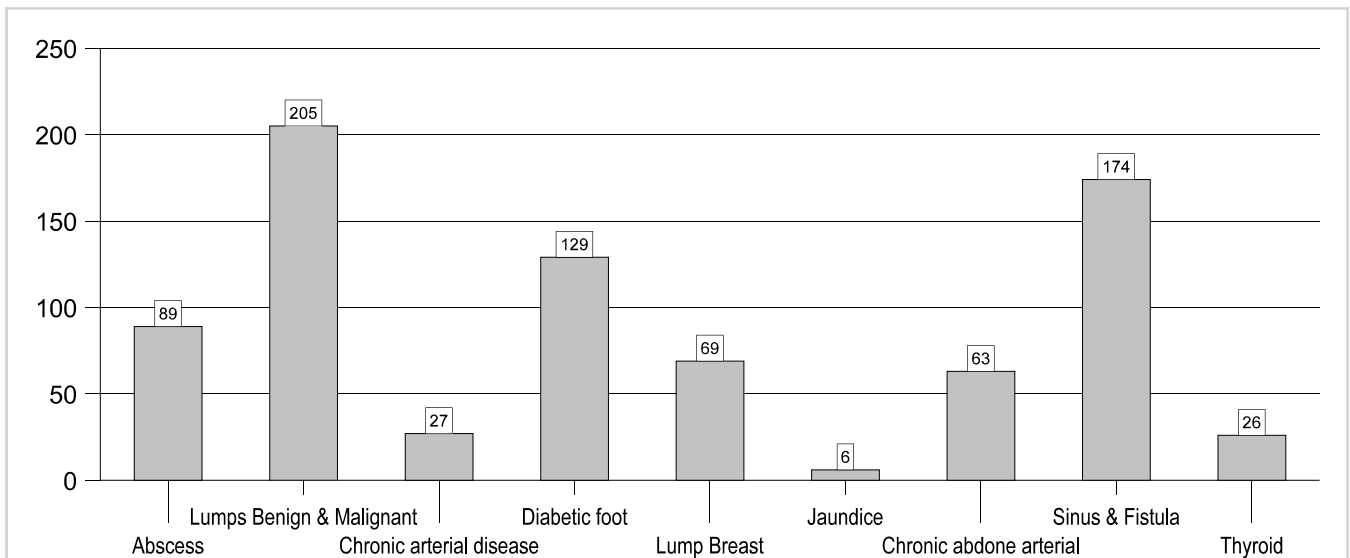
**Table-I. Breakup of patients with reference to age and sex distribution (Total n=788)**



**Fig-1. Breakup on the basis of locality and education**

Lumps and bumps on various parts of the body (excluding Breast) was the most common reason of admission in surgical ward seen in 205 patients (26.01%) followed by sinus and fistulas 174 patients (22.08%). Out of all 274 lumps including of breast, 29 (10.58%) cases were of malignant lesions. Various reasons of admission in surgical ward is given in Fig-2.

Among the various spiritual ways of healing adapted by patients self-prayer was the most common seen in all patients followed by Mannat & Murad ( Holy commitment) adopted by 239 out of 788 patients. Break up of different spiritual ways of healing adopted by patient either alone or / and as an adjuvant with medical treatment is given in Table-II.



**Fig-2. Reasons of admission in surgical ward**

Spiritual healing technique	As primary method	As an adjunct to medical treatment
Self-prayer	31	788
Dam & Darood (Holy Blow)	191	213
Visit to shrine	153	279
Holy water / oil message	39	78
Mannat & Murad (Holy commitment)	239	455
Spiritual healers	232	130
Taweez ( Holy prescription)	73	91
Animal sacrifice	19	293
Holy thread	69	29
Multiple	38	165

**Table-II. Ways of spiritual healing adopted by patients**

## DISCUSSION

Is there any evidence that faith healing works? The first step in approaching this question is to specify what should be considered the proof that an ailment has been healed by a supernatural method. To prove it three criteria must be met: the ailment must be one that normally doesn't recover without treatment, there must not have been any medical treatment that would be expected to influence the ailment; both diagnosis and recovery must be demonstrable by detailed medical evidence<sup>2,3,4</sup>.

Has any " Faith healer" ever sent for the medical records of a client? Or had a client examined by a doctor before and after healing is administered? Or inquired about a client's health months or years after healing? Or ever kept statistics to indicate what percentage of people with various ailments appear to have been helped? Or compiled data that an independent investigator could verify? No healer has ever done any of these things. On the

other hand, many cases have been documented in which people with serious disease have died as a result of abandoning effective medical care after being "healed." In functional ailments in which symptoms are bodily reactions to tension, this may be true to some extent. Patients with functional ailments who visit " healers" may feel better because the experience causes them to relax or because of placebo effect. The people who are not relieved may conclude that they are "unworthy" and become depressed as a result. Money spent for a fruitless experience with a healer is another negative factor<sup>6,7</sup>.

A 1996 poll of 1,000 adults found that 79% believed that spiritual faith can help people recover from disease<sup>7,8</sup>. This idea is also popular among physicians. Although many studies have found associations between various measures of religiosity and health, no well –designed study has demonstrated that religious beliefs or prayer actually benefit health<sup>7</sup>. In fact, one well-designed study found just the opposite. The study involved patients whose progress was followed for nine months after discharge from a British hospital. They evaluated the outpatient records and the responses of 189 patients to questionnaires. The researchers concluded that the health status of patients with stronger spiritual beliefs were more than twice as likely to be unimproved or worse<sup>11</sup>. Although some studies have found that churchgoers tend to be healthier and to live longer than non-churchgoers, church attendance itself is unlikely to be responsible for the difference<sup>10,11</sup>.

A Cochrane review of intercessory prayers found conflicting evidence for claims of positive effect, but there was a conclusion that " evidence presented so far is interesting enough to justify further study<sup>3,11,12</sup>. A recent study found that intercessory prayer had no effect on complication-free recovery from heart surgery, but curiously the group certain of receiving intercessory prayer experienced higher rates of complications<sup>11</sup>.

Available scientific evidence does not support claims that faith healing can actually cure physical ailments. One review published in 1998 looked at

172 cases of death among children treated by faith healing instead of conventional methods. They estimated that if conventional treatment had been given, the survival rate for most of these children would have been more than 90 percent, with the remainder of the children also having a good chance of survival<sup>12</sup>.

The American Medical Association consider that prayer as therapy should not be medically reimbursable or deductible expense<sup>21</sup>.

Think if we are sick, and ask the Allah to heal us, and to do all for us that is necessary to be done. Is it possible that one ask the Allah to cause my wheat and corn to grow, without ploughing the ground and casting in seed? It is consistent to apply every remedy that comes with in the range of our knowledge, and then to ask Allah to sanctify that application to the healing of body. Suppose people travelling in a train in the mountains, and one or two are taken sick, without anything in the

world in the shape of healing medicine within our reach, what should we do? According to our faith being a Muslim, ask the Allah Almighty to.... heal the sick. This is our privilege, when so situated that we cannot get anything to help ourselves. Then the Allah can do all. But it is our duty to do, when we have it in our reach and then pray to Allah.

The practice of spiritual healing, called "Ruqya" in Islam is as old as Islam itself. The concept of using Divine positive energy to counter the negative created forces such as those of the Evil Eye, Black Magic and the like is inherent to the Islamic understanding of life and the forces that it is comprised of. The 'Ruqya' treatment is remained as a viable option and alternative in holistic healthcare in modern world<sup>13</sup>.

We the Muslims, believing in One Allaha-SubhanaTalah, the Holy Book Quran Pak revealed on the last prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Allah says;<sup>14,15</sup>

The source of all healing, in the Islamic perspective is Allah (God) Almighty Himself. The Holy Quran says:

وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ ﴿٨٠﴾

"And when I fall ill, so it is He Who heals me."

[Al-Quran 26:80]

Furthermore, Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran, which is the sacred text of Islam, that His Revealed Words are a cure for all ailments.

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"And We send down in the Qur'an that which is a cure for the Believers, and a mercy ..."

[Al-Quran 17:82]

The Holy Quran is therefore a healing for all ailments be they related to the mind (psychological), body (physical), or soul (spiritual). Furthermore, not only is the message that the Holy Quran brings a guiding light for the sincere seeker, the Words themselves carry a positive Divine energy.

When these Divine words are recited and blown on an ailing patient there is a positive energy released to counter the negative energy that is taken by a patient from a state of ease to one "dis-ease. This method, which contributes towards the healing process is termed "Dum"<sup>13</sup>.

These Devine words can also be consumed orally by writing them on a piece of non-toxic paper in an edible ink and placing that paper in water and then drinking that holy water, known as "ta'weez" an Arabic word meaning protection<sup>13</sup>. Similarly holy oil prepared in same way for message.

Therefore the concept of protection against negative forces is inherent in Islamic tradition as exemplified by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him family). There are numerous Prophetic saying (Hadeeth) to this effect. Sayings of Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him family) are:<sup>13,16,17,18</sup>.

Narrated 'Aisha

During the Prophet's fatal illness, he used to recite the Mu'auwidhat (Surat An-Nas and Surat Al-Falaq) and then blow his breath over his body. When his illness was aggravated, I used to recite those two Suras and blow my breath over him and make him rub his body with his own hand for its blessings." (Ma'mar asked Az-Zuhri: How did the Prophet use to blow? Az-Zuhri said: He used to blow on his hands and then passed them over his face.) SahaiBukhariVolume 7, Book 71, Number 631:

Narrated Al-Aswad

I asked 'Aisha about treating poisonous stings (a snake-bite or a scorpion sting) with a Ruqya. She said, "The Prophet allowed the treatment of poisonous sting with Ruqya." SahaiBukhariVolume 7, Book 71, Number 637:

Narrated 'Aisha

The Prophet, during his fatal ailment used to blow (on his hands and pass them) over his body while

reciting the Mu'auwidhat (Surat-an-Nas and Surat-al-Falaq). When his disease got aggravated, I used to recite them for him and blow (on his hands) and let him pass his hands over his body because of its blessing. (Ma'mar asked IbnShihab: How did he use to do Nafth? He said: He used to blow on his hands and then pass them over his face.) SahaiBukhariVolume 7, Book 71, Number 647:

We observed in our study that majority of patients adopted one or other way of spiritual / faith healing. This practice of various faith healing techniques was seen more frequently in female patients as compared to male patients, 52.53% and 47.31% respectively. Patients from rural background were more indulged in these practices as compared to urban population. Surprisingly there was no much difference in practicing spiritual ways of healing as far as the literacy is concerned. It has been observed in local studies carried out in the same population area of district Gujrat and Sialkot, that the patients who adopted only spiritual techniques for healing / cure of the ailments, eventually land in to health care facility with advanced disease. It has been observed that rate of below knee major amputations in diabetic were very high in those who adopted one or other way of faith /spiritual healing as a primary modality as compared to those who took medical/ surgical treatment timely. This was due to delay caused by late presentation to hospital<sup>19</sup>. Same reason of late presentation of patients with carcinoma of the breast was observed so that they present at incurable / advanced stage due to delay caused by spiritual practices<sup>20</sup>.

Being a Muslim we should take guidance from Holy Quran and sayings of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

"One day Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) noticed a Bedouin leaving his camel without tying it and he asked the Bedouin," Why don't you tie down your camel? "The Bedouin answered, "I put my trust in Allah." The Prophet (peace be upon him) then said, " Tie your camel first, then put your trust in Allah"

(Al-Trimidhi) Narrated Abu Huraira:

The Prophet said, "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment." Sahai Bukhari Volume 7, Book 71, Number 582:

This is a classic answer for those who believe that their faith will carry them through life. Innocence can indeed be a valuable shield but there are basic measures that have to be taken just as a matter of common sense. If you leave the jar of honey open by morning it may be full of ants. No amount of belief is going to change the basic facts of living in this world. Sometimes we can very easily forget that we have to do our bit in our endeavors as well; effort and struggle is required from us if we truly want to achieve or attain something.....

## CONCLUSIONS

Being a Muslim we have strong believe that "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that he also has created its treatment. We must trust Allah, and it is consistent to apply every remedy that comes with in the range of one's knowledge, and then to ask Allah to sanctify that application to the healing of ailment. Religious scholars, electronic as well as print media can play a vital role in making people aware of this fact that will eventually lead to early diagnosis, treatment and better outcome of various body ailments.

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