



Naturopathic Doctors Qualitative Study of Prayer in Ghana: How much do we know?

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Background: Spirituality is paramount in the life of the Ghanaian patient seeking for healing. Most of them end up in the Prayer camps seeking the face of God. Today, there are many Naturopathic practitioners in Ghana who have incorporated prayer activities in their services. Majority of these practitioners are also Pastors. We intend to examine the role of prayer in Naturopathic Profession, using Ghana as a case model. **Objectives:** This study evaluates the qualitative aspect of the efficacy of prayer as a form of Naturopathic protocol incorporated by practitioners of naturopathy in their healthcare delivery. **Methods:** This is a qualitative study which incorporated a drafted open-ended questionnaire sent via WhatsApp to thirty (30) Naturopathic practitioners with pastoral backgrounds who are members of the Ghana Association of Naturopathic Physicians (GANP) in their various Naturopathic facilities with pastoral services. **Results:** Naturopathic practitioners opined that, patients seek the services of prayer from their centers as a complementary therapy, as part of their therapeutic order protocol. Others also explained that patients also seek the services of prayer as a standard treatment for their medical conditions. **Conclusion:** We observed that, effective prayer plays an integral role in the healing process of the sick patient. Prayer is often used by practitioners of Naturopathy as a complementary therapy and not as standard treatment therapy.

Keywords: Naturopathy, Healthcare policy, Primary healthcare, Profession, Scope.

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INTRODUCTION

Naturopathy is growing in Ghana. However, there are many people practicing Naturopathy who are religious leaders as well. These practitioners combine their religious activities with their practice of Naturopathy. This poses some challenges to many patients who cannot tell whether the religious leader is indeed an educated Naturopathic doctor. This scenario in Ghana exists due to the porous nature of the practice and the regulatory body. Spirituality, however, cannot be underestimated in the practice of Naturopathy. A study by Dirkse, (2014), which investigates Christian therapists' perceptions on the use of prayer in psychotherapy interviewed Four licensed Christian therapists in regard to the following areas: demographics, how prayer is used in therapy,

therapist's perceptions on the use of prayer in therapy, and therapist's perceptions on the effectiveness of prayer in mitigating symptoms of emotional difficulty. The major themes from the data demonstrate that Christian therapists approach the use of prayer in a client-focused and non-directive way, the use and efficacy of prayer is dependent upon the client, and that prayer has positive outcomes for the client in regard to mitigating symptoms of emotional difficulties. The findings of the study highlight the sensitive nature of utilizing prayer in therapy with clients, and that it can also be beneficial, both for the therapeutic relationship and in mitigating symptoms of emotional difficulties in clients.

There are many empirical studies that have demonstrated that a person's beliefs are paramount in

healing. For instance, Wachholtz and Sambamoorthi, 2011, study of prayer used for health concerns increased between 2001 and 2007. The authors noted that, the escalating positive association between pain and prayer use for health concerns over time suggests that it is critical for mental and physical health treatment providers to be aware of the prevalence of this coping resource.

The role of Jesus in the healing ministry and other apostles in the Bible have all demonstrated that prayer is effective in healing. How well do we know about the effect of prayer in our Ghanaian healthcare industry? We intend to examine this from the Ghanaian perspective using Naturopathic practitioners as a case study. These practitioners employ prayer in their practice as well.

METHODOLOGY

This study embraces the qualitative (open-ended) approach examining the adopting of prayer as part of Naturopathic practice in Ghana. Questionnaires were the main instruments developed for data collection. This case study centered on three thematic areas for this research:

- i. Prayer as a Naturopathic Practice.
- ii. Significance of prayer in healthcare delivery and why patients opt for prayer as an alternative to standard medical care.
- iii. Finally, the paper examines the scientific evidence in using prayer in Naturopathic medicine

The Questionnaire

A drafted questionnaire was employed to collect primary data from the respondents for the study. The questionnaires entail a set of open-ended questions administered to 30 respondents. The respondents in this study were selected practitioners of Naturopathic medicine who are members of Ghana Naturopathic Physicians Association, Tema, Community, 7. The respondents' feedbacks were edited and analyzed. The feedbacks were almost the same, hence, we have extracted only two and used for this report.

Findings

This section analyses the respondent's narratives for the qualitative case study. Twenty-eight participants provided their responses for the qualitative studies. However, we reviewed the feedbacks and abstracted them as majority of their responses were similar. We therefore selected few narratives for this section. We adopted Pseudonyms to help protect respondents' anonymity. Survey questionnaire in this section that were asked and addressed were:

- i. Tell me a little about yourself.
- ii. Describe how you became interested in the topic of spirituality and healing as a Naturopathic Physician.

- iii. As Naturopath, do you believe in the power of Prayer and healing?
- iv. There are many scientists and medical practitioners who believe that spirituality and healing is of no use. Do you agree with them?
- v. Do you support Patients seeking for medical solutions at the prayer camps?
- vi. Do you think your Patients believe in Prayer for their healing?
- vii. Why do Patients opt (Pull factors) for Prayer as Complementary alternative medicines?
- viii. What are some of the push factors from patients with regards to Mainstream Medicine?
- ix. Does spirituality play an important role in primary healthcare?
- x. Which medical condition causes people to seek for prayer after they have been diagnosed with it?
- xi. In your opinion, should prayer be incorporated as a complementary therapy into our healthcare delivery in Ghana?
- xii. How beneficial is fasting in Naturopathic Medical Practice?
- xiii. How beneficial is faith in Naturopathic Medical Practice?
- xiv. How does religion also affect the practice of Naturopathic Medical Practice?
- xv. Should Prayer, fasting and faith be tested scientifically before and after medical treatment?
- xvi. Why do you have interest in prayer and medicine?

Below are the researchers' description and respondents' narratives:

Yaa

Yaa is a registered Naturopathic Medicine Practitioner and operates a private facility in the Ashaiman Municipality. She has been practicing for more than five years. She entered into the practice through the apprenticeship system. She received no medical education in natural medicine but holds a First Degree in Education and a Masters from Russia. She is currently a level 200, second semester Naturopathic Medical Student at Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine and a member of the Ghana Naturopathic Physician Association. She is pursuing a Diploma in Naturopathic Medicine.

According to her, she once had a patient whose condition had become very severe to the point that all hope appeared lost. She had used all natural modalities in an attempt to help the patient, but still did not have any result. However, as soon as the relative prayed, the patient began to respond to treatment. "There is a saying that man opposes whereas God dispossess. This tells you that in everything, we must put God first. This is how I became interested in spirituality and healing as a naturopathic physician". On whether she believed in

prayer as a Naturopathic doctor, she had this to say: “I do believe in prayer and healing because they are natural and not harmful. As a naturopathic physician, all your treatment must be natural without side effects”. On whether scientists and medical practitioners believe that spirituality and healing is of no use. She had a different view. According to her, there could be a situation where the practitioner would do their best in trying to heal the patient, but all attempts would prove futile. “In this world we do not only face physical battles we also face spiritual ones. So as a practitioner, if you do your best and find no result, it means it is a spiritual battle which must be tackled spiritually”. On whether patients should seek medical solutions in prayer camps? She asserts that, in the camp, the pastors play their role to solve problem only if it is spiritual. “Medical solutions must also be taken into considerations such that, if the illness is a physical problem, then we treat it”. She is of strong believe that, patients believe God is the healer of every ailment, thus, they pray whenever they’re sick and visit the hospital as well. This goes to say that prayer backed by medical treatment should be incorporated or integrated when one is down with illness for effective healing.

On what is accounting for patients opting for prayer for their medical illness at the expense of standard medical treatment, she posits that, they do this based on their patient faith or religious background. Thus, a practitioner would have to grant the patients wish or request for prayer before giving treatment.

Addressing the very important question on whether patients opt for prayer as an alternative method or as complementary therapy, she narrates: “A patient opting for prayer is like a complementary therapy. Because they offer a different approach to conventional medicine. The complementary therapy such as yoga, massage, and other medications are not part of the patient’s treatment, but it is the patient’s choice to pray before, during and after the treatment”. Also, on whether spirituality plays an important role in primary healthcare? She is in agreement and asserts that, Spirituality shows the connection between your belief and your sense of wellbeing. Positive beliefs also contribute to the wellbeing of the patient. She avers that, diseases or conditions that are not responsive to treatment or chronic cases are the major ones’ patient normally employ prayer in seeking solutions for. When asked if prayer should be incorporated as a complementary therapy into our healthcare delivery in Ghana? She opined that, prayers are complementary therapy because they are not drugs that could destroy the immune system but emotional or faith can be combined with natural modalities of healing for the patient to be well. This means that prayer should be incorporated into the primary healthcare delivery for patients depending on their faith.

The next question tackles fasting as an important practice in Naturopathic Medical Practice.

Interestingly, she believes that, fasting is not as beneficial, but some patients would like to fast to call on God, depending on their beliefs. However, on the issue of whether faith is important in Naturopathic Medical Practice, she hurriedly supported this concept and narrates: “Faith is very beneficial to naturopathic medicine practitioners. This is because if the practitioner is giving the treatment and the patient doesn’t believe in the said treatment, it will be difficult to get positive results. Even in the Bible, the woman with the blood issue touched Jesus’ garment and He said to her “your faith has made you whole”. On whether religion also affects the practice of Naturopathic Medical Practice? She disagrees and addressed thus, religion is not medication to be given to a patient. However, there is a believe that we get naturally healed which helps in patient recovery.

Another important question she addressed was whether Prayer, fasting and faith should be tested scientifically before and after medical treatment. She disagrees and said they are personal to the patient and that there is no need for them to be subjected to scientific analysis. The last question finally asked “why do you have interest in prayer and medicine?”. She narrates: “Prayer is everything. You can pray and at a point, take your medicine. So when there is need for prayer it should done. Same as taking medicine”

Kwesi on the other hand is a Professional Naturopath based in Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana. He has been practicing for over ten years and is also a Pastor. He opined that, patients opt for prayer as complementary medicine and not alternative medical care. He however believes that, it is dependent on what the practitioner also tells the client to do. He asserts that, lack of scientific equipment to diagnose medical conditions at the conventional hospitals is a major setback and is a driving force which pushes patients away from conventional facilities. He also explained that, where a patient is told that there is nothing wrong with them medically, the patient obviously has no other option than to seek for prayer. This is because such patients eventually accept the believe that their conditions are probably linked to witchcraft. For Kwesi, who provides prayer services as a naturopathic doctor in his facility on Fridays, he narrates: “I tell them that, this is a prayer session. Also, I make them know that, the prayer session is free and they like to attend the free session a lot”. He also believes that ineffective drugs, financial challenges and a spiritual mindset is another major challenge driving patients from standard medical treatment to complementary and alternative practitioners. “I combine bio resonance diagnosis to my practice as a Naturopath”. He narrates how he has successfully treated many patients using prayer and natural medicines combined. He cites a case where a patient attempted Two IVFs in an attempt to conceive a baby, but both attempts failed. Finally, the patient received her breakthrough after visiting his facility. He

said, he always prays on all his medications before dispensing them to the patients. "I have gift of healing so I pray for such people", he emphasized. He also narrates how one HIV patient's viral load was reduced significantly after he prayed. Other cases he narrates were cervical cancer, peptic ulcer and Rhesus factor incompatibility. These patients all had their quality of life improved drastically after assessing his services. He emphasized, "60% of patients prefer prayers to even drug administration in my facility", he said. He was quick to add that, prayer centers where patients are made to pay for services at exorbitant fees scare patients. "We preach the healing potency of God's power hence the shift to prayer. Some also listen to testimonies of colleagues to opt for prayer as medical healing", he concluded.

CONCLUSIONS

We observed that, prayer plays an important role in Naturopathic medical practice in the Ghanaian jurisdiction. Patients are interested in Naturopathic centers which have prayer facilities in addition. This was evident in one respondent's analysis which states how he successfully treated many patients using prayer and natural medicines combined. He real life examples and said, he always prays on all his medications before dispensing them to the patient. "I have gift of healing so I pray for such people", he emphasized. He also narrates how one HIV patient viral load was reduced significantly after he prayed. Other cases he narrates where cervical cancer, ulcerative and Rhesus factor patient incompatibility patients all had their quality of life improved drastically after assessing his services. He emphasized: "60% of patients prefer prayers to even drug administration in my facility", he said. He was quick to add that, prayer centers where patients are made to pay for services at exorbitant fees scare patients. "We preach the healing potency of God's power hence the shift to prayer. Some also listens to testimonies of colleagues to opt for prayer as medical healing", he concluded. Additionally, we further observed that, Patients are also adopting prayer as a complementary therapy and not as a standard therapy. Hence, it will be prudent for those camped at the prayer camps to seek standard medical services as well in order not to complicate their conditions. The pastor who also doubles as a Naturopathic doctor attending to them at the prayer camps should have basic understanding of medical issues as well to appreciate this further in handling the patients. We observed further that, in Ghana, the major driver or pull factors contributing to the patients drifting to prayer as complementary alternative medicines is the promotion of testimonies

from colleagues, the perception of witchcraft attached to their medical conditions; financial issues as well as the medical science inability to diagnose some cases presented at the hospitals are the major challenges. For instance, one narrates: "A patient opting for prayer is like a complementary therapy. Because they offer a different approach to convention medicine. The complementary therapy such as yoga, massage, medication...etc are not part of the patient's treatment but it's the patient's choice to pray before, during and after the treatment".

Ethical Consideration

Ethical consideration for this case study research was obtained from the President of Ghana Association of Naturopathic Physicians (GANP), the umbrella body of graduate Naturopathic doctors and Naturopaths in Ghana.

Conflict of Interest

We declare that there is no conflict of interest in terms of ownership of shares, consultancy, speaker's honoraria or research grants from commercial companies or professional or governmental organizations with an interest in the topic of the paper.

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