

I. BASIC PATIENT DATA

Chaplain - Robert Baral

Patient – AB, 40+ year old female, married

Length of Visit - 20 min; Unit - medical

Religion - Protestant Christianity and reincarnation

Significant Others - husband, children, Church circles, many friends

Theme – A Patient’s Desperate Bargaining for Divine Healing:

“If I Submit Enough,

Cancer Can Not Exist in The Presence of GOD’s Love”

II. FACTS OF THE CASE

The patient is a 40+ year old female who has recently undergone complex pelvic surgery for removal of a Stage IV pelvic tumor. The patient anticipates going home to be with husband and children, then returning to hospital to begin radiation and chemo therapies. She advises she was told by her Doctor that she has a 40% chance of living if she takes both chemo and radiation therapies.

I was initially referred to this patient by her Doctor for “stress related to cancer.” The patient was extremely anxious and tearful on my first visit a few days ago. I reported this to the patient’s Nurse after the 1st visit, who agreed with my observations. She advised that she would call patient’s Doctor and request further medication for anxiety. On my 2nd visit, the Nurse reported that the patient was much less anxious after beginning further medication and after my pastoral visit, which she felt was very calming to the patient. I observed there was a marked decrease in agitation.

This is my 3rd visit with this patient in several days. The patient tells me that I am part of her “revelation of GOD’s Peace” and has asked me to visit with her daily “for prayer.” If all goes to plan, this will be my last visit with her, as she will be discharged home to family and then on to begin further cancer treatment elsewhere.

III. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Patient is married, the mother of several children. Both patient and husband have Masters in mental health counseling. The patient describes herself as having experimented with many religions, believes in reincarnation, and feels she is suffering from cancer now because she did not submit to “GOD’s will” in a previous life. She feels she receives direct auditory messages from GOD, which she writes down on index cards at her bedside.

Presently she attends an Assemblies of GOD Church with a close friend, where she receives prayer for healing, which she finds very uplifting. She clutches a small stuffed animal of a lion to her heart when she prays and when she receives messages from GOD, which she calls her “Lion of GOD.”

IV. CHAPLAIN’S PREPARATION

My heart has been grieving for this lady, her husband and their children. I can picture the terrible empty whole that the death of this wife and mother would leave in her family. I stood for a moment at the Nurse’s station and silently read a prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi,

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
And it is in dying unto Thee, O CHRIST,
that we are reborn to eternal life...!” AMEN. ¹

¹ 1, adapted from Saint Francis of Assisi, “Peace Prayer.

V. INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Patient is in the 2nd bed by window. Dividing curtain is drawn closed. A young to middle aged lady, the patient's close friend, is sitting in a chair by the window at the foot of the bed facing the doorway. The room is well lit. The patient is lying in bed, holding a stuffed animal of a lion to her chest. Both welcome me in.

VI. THE VISIT

P = patient AB; F = Friend Z ; C = Chaplain

C1 - Hello, Mrs. B? It's Chaplain Bob. May I come in?

P1 - Yes. Come in!

F1 - Hello.

C2 - [I enter the room and go to the patient's bedside.] Hi Mrs. B. I'm coming by to see you again today as you asked. [I offer my hand.]

P2 - [Patient takes my hand.] Hello Chaplain Bob! I'm so glad to see you! This is my friend Z.

C3 - [I shake hands with the patient's friend. I see an unused chair by the bedside.] May I have a seat?

P3 - Of course! [To her friend] This is Bob, the Chaplain I was telling you about. He's here to give me my daily dose of prayer and peace.

F2 - [Friend smiles.] So glad to meet you, Chaplain Bob!

C4 - [I sit.] How are you doing today, A?

P4 - I was a little anxious before, but I'm doing better now.

C5 - What were you anxious about?

P5 - I'm hoping to go home soon before going to... [a major well known cancer hospital] So maybe tomorrow.

C6 - You're anxious to get home to your husband and kids. It must be tough to be here away from them.

P6 - [Patient changes the subject] I got another message from GOD.

[Patient has a small stack of 3 x 5 index cards on her bedside table. She picks up the top card.] Would you like me to read it to you?

C7 - I would be glad to hear it.

P7 - "Dear A. I have punished you with this cancer because you did not obey Me in your past life in Egypt. But now, if you submit to My will for you, I will heal you of your cancer, make you whole again and bless you in every way with My Love. Cancer can not exist in The Presence of My Love."

C8 - And what is GOD's will for you in this?

P8 - [Patient looks at me. She takes my hand. She is smiling broadly.] That if I do what my Doctor's tell me to do, GOD will cure me completely of my cancer.

C9 - I see. [I pause for a moment.] And what have the Doctors told you?

P9 - That if I take chemo and radiation, that I will have a 40% chance of living. But I know that, if I do this, that GOD will heal my cancer completely!

C10 - I see.

P10 - Isn't that wonderful?

C11 - [Caution! I tell myself to proceed carefully here.] That is a very beautiful message of encouragement. And I will certainly pray that all those good things come to pass for you.

C12 - [Pause] And how do you see this all working out?

P11 - I will go home, and then to... [another hospital] for my treatments. And GOD will heal my cancer! But could you read your Scripture for me and pray for me now?

C13 - I would be happy to. Would you like to talk more about any of this first?

P12 - No. I just want you to read a Scripture for me and pray now.

C14 - [I read a PSALM and prayed for Mrs. B as she wished. I invited her and her friend Z to hold my hands for prayer, which they did.]

PSALM 33:10-12

²⁰ Our soul waits for The LORD;

He is our help and our shield.

²¹ For our heart shall rejoice in Him,

Because we have trusted in His Holy Name.

²² Let Your Mercy, O LORD, be upon us,

Just as we hope in You. ²

P13 - [Patient remains silent for a short time, her eyes remain closed, she is smiling. I let go of their hands.] Thank you. That was so beautiful!

C14 - A, thank you for letting me be with you and your friend Z today. If you ever come back to our hospital, I want you to feel free to call for us. [Patient reaches up to give me a hug. Her friend shakes my hand. I smile and suppress my sense of tearfulness for this dear lady.]

² 2, NKJV, PSALM 33:10-12.

P14 – I will, Chaplain Bob! Thank you! [Patient remains smiling. I exit. The patient returned to the hospital a few months later, having completed all radiation and chemo treatments, where she died with her family at her side.]

VII. EXPRESSED CONCERNS

1. Patient believes that GOD will heal her of her cancer if she “submits to GOD’s will.” She defines “GOD’s will” as submitting to her Doctor’s prescribed treatment plan of chemo and radiation therapy, which she believes will assure her of a full cure. She states, “Cancer can not exist in the Presence of GOD’s Love.” 2. Patient is concerned that, if she does not have me pray with her again today, that she will not be able to “relax” tonight. 3. Pt is unable to talk about her suppressed fears that she might die from her cancer and not be able to be with and care for her husband and children. Her Faith-healing construct of a guaranteed cure from GOD is a complex and ongoing emotional self defense mechanism of denial.

VIII. YOUR SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT

1. Spiritual distress related to fear of dying from cancer; 2. worry of what will happen to her husband and family if she dies; 3. denial of possibility that she might not be cured of her cancer; 4. bargaining with GOD in order to secure certain Divine healing; 5. sense of fatalism and Divine punishment evidenced by sins in past lives; 6. possible delusions driven by unspoken desperation, as evidenced by “GOD talking to me directly with messages,” combined with personal Divine Revelation through Holy Scripture.

IX. SPIRITUAL CARE PROVIDED & OBSERVED OUTCOME

I provided 1. attentive listening; 2. summarizing and reflecting back; 3. affirming patient’s understanding of GOD’s Presence and Love; 4. avoiding judgment of patient’s faith-healing thesis; 5. Scripture reading; 6. prayer.

By the end of the visit, I observed 1. the patient felt free to share; 2. the patient confirmed my understanding of what she shared; 3. the patient trusted me enough to read to me from her personal devotion card; 4. the patient closed her eyes and rested quietly while I read; 5. The patient and friend held my hands for prayer and said The Our Father with me; 6. the patient seemed more at ease and expressed deep thanks.

X. SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT USING THE “FICA” MODEL ³

F = Faith - Assemblies of GOD and reincarnation. Patient finds meaning in life and understanding of her illness through a combination of these. Her sense of GOD being imminently Present with her at all times has given her great comfort and encouragement through her cancer diagnosis and now after major pelvic surgery for her condition. She speaks of her struggles using Biblical terms. She read The Bible and prays frequently.

I = Importance and Influence - Both very important. Patient believes she receives direct revelations from GOD in “messages,” which she records – word for word – on index cards at her bedside. She has a small and growing stack of them. She speaks of her faith as having a past life in Egypt, in which she rejected “GOD’s will,” that she is afflicted with cancer now as a punishment, but that GOD promises here complete cure if she will now submit to His will, which she defines as following chemo and radiation therapies offered by her Doctors.

C = Community - Patient is very devoted as a wife and mother to her husband and children. She has several close and supportive friends. She attends Church regularly with a close friend/neighbor. She finds The Church very supportive and encouraging. Not clear to me if they share patient’s faith convictions, nor if she has shared non-Biblical aspects of her faith-healing convictions with her Pastor. She gave the impression that her family does not attend Church with her regularly at present.

A = Address and Application - Patient’s decisions to accept further cancer therapies is directly dependent upon her faith worldview, which tells her that she should proceed as her Doctors suggest. Any major medical or nursing care must pass the test of being within “GOD’s will” for her. At present, both are in fully congruent.

³ 3, The “FICA Spiritual Assessment Tool.” Developed by Dr. Christina Puchalski, MD.

XI. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

From the patient's perspective, she has set on a bargain with GOD: "LORD, if I submit to Your will – taking the chemo and radiation therapies my Doctors have recommended – then You will cure me of cancer and let me live." Further, she believes that she has been either allowed to develop, or been given, cancer as a punishment from GOD because of what she calls her "disobedience to GOD's will" in past lives.

Further, her understanding of GOD's Love does not permit the existence of cancer in her body. If she can call down GOD's Presence of Love upon herself by adequately submitting to "GOD's will," then of necessity the cancer must be annihilated. As she shared, "Cancer can not exist in The Presence of GOD's Love."

It may be that this lady feels she has cancer now because she is dwelling in The Presence of GOD's punishment, which she sees as calling her to submit to what she defines as His will – following her Doctor's advice to receive chemo and radiation therapies. The catastrophic potential for deep spiritual disruption and shaking of her faith in GOD is apparent, if the further treatments do not cure her cancer.

If this lady's expectations are not met in complete healing of her cancer, she will suffer a deep and catastrophic spiritual crisis. I would expect her to cry out as with Job as in JOB 10:1-2, "My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto GOD, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me!"⁴ Lack of complete healing would shake her understanding of Who GOD is and how He works in men's lives, potentially robbing her of finding Peace in her Faith Tradition when she faces her death.

We don't always know why some people develop severe illnesses, while others do not. Malignant cancer may be more easy to cope with emotionally and spiritually in some ways if the disease can be traced to a clear cause. But when one lives what one considers a righteous life of Faith and Love, which is the case with this lady, and then one develops cancer which can not be traced to a clear cause, the situation is like that of Job.

⁴ KJV, JOB 10:1-2.

Sometimes the best that one can do is to cry out to GOD in one's tears and grief – denial, bargaining, anger, sadness - trusting in the end as did Job, that GOD's Mercy and Love will make things right. Sometimes there is healing in this life of catastrophic disease or injury - and sometimes not. But trusting in GOD's Grace, there is always the Hope of Faith that He will make all things right in Eternity for all those who cry out to Him.

As Job confesses in JOB 19:25-27, “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see GOD: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me!”⁵

XII. PSYCHOLOGICAL & SOCIAL ANALYSES

The patient has the earnest desire, as a wife and mother who loves her family, to not die and leave them without her presence in their lives. She has the very human desire to continue to live. She has the need for hope for the future in this life, that her desires will be met. She has the need to construct an understanding and make sense of her present cancer illness within her spiritual and religious worldviews. And so she does.

Our secular post-Christian society generally still holds up the model of ultimate fulfillment for women of becoming wives and mothers. These 2 roles are the center of this patient's life and are intimately connected with her sense of security and self-worth. Her cancer illness is threatening to steal from her these 2 social roles by the threats of debilitating illness, prolonged suffering and premature death.

XIII. FUTURE PASTORAL OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED

Firstly, I was not able to pursue the logical question of this lady's belief, that GOD was punishing her with cancer because of her disobedience to GOD's will in a previous life. The patient did not want to risk being challenged in her faith-healing bargain with GOD by discussing the question in detail. I would have liked to ask, “What was GOD's will for you in these previous lives that you did not meet?” “Why do you feel GOD would be punishing you now with cancer for such offenses in past lives?”

⁵ 4, KJV, JOB 19:25-27.

Secondly, the question of the nature of the messages that this lady felt she was receiving directly from GOD needed further exploring. Is this an audible Voice? Are there visual manifestations? Or are these feelings generally that the patient is then interpreting as she writes them down? Or is she receiving the messages word for word from GOD? And just because I have never miraculously received such Divine messages, is it reasonable for me to automatically discount their validity? Absent the heresy of reincarnation, is not The Christian Faith a faith of miracles and revelations from GOD?

Thirdly, I noted the patient changed the subject of being separated from her husband and children due to her hospitalization to her faith-healing construct. Her family does not attend Church with her. There are no pictures of them at her bedside. Nor have I met them on any visits. This, in spite of her love and devotion to them, which she shared with me. I would be curious to ask, "What does your family think of your bargain with GOD for your healing?" It may be they do not embrace the message, so central to this lady's coping with her illness, and thus some distance.

XIV. SELF ANALYSIS AS THE CHAPLAIN

As I listened to this patient, I pictured myself banging my fists on a table before GOD and crying out to Him, "LORD, this is not fair! This kind of thing shouldn't happen!" I felt a sense of helpless anger over the case. I felt bitter tears of picturing this lady's husband and children crying over her grave, waving their fists, shouting to Heaven, "GOD, why?" I pictured myself there with them doing the same.

I pictured the horror of my own family experience of my sister-in-law dying of breast cancer with spread to her lungs many years ago, leaving behind a shattered husband and 3 lost little children. And inside me, I cry out to GOD, "LORD, this is not fair! This kind of thing shouldn't happen!" And at her funeral, which I missed by 24 hours, shouting out to Heaven at her grave, I cried in the dirt for them all, "Why, GOD?" I feared that this lady's family would eventually meet the same horror that my brother and his children once met and have lived with daily ever since.

I felt afraid for this lady and the very real possibility that she will die of her cancer, which she is in no way capable of facing. I felt afraid for myself, fearful of what it might look like if my own cancer recurs. But then I recall PSALM 56:3-4, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee. In GOD I will praise His Word, in GOD I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.”⁶

But more than the disease itself, I fear the hand of modern medicine and nursing upon me, should my own cancer recur. Like this patient, I take solace here: HEBREWS 13:5-6, “...for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”⁷ As our Redeemer Himself assures us in MATTHEW 28:20, “...lo, I AM with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”⁸ Even so, Lord, though I know Your Word, in my humanity, I am still afraid for all these things. And so I prayed.

⁶ 4, KJV, PSALM 56:3-4

⁷ 4, KJV, HEBREWS 13:5-6.

⁸ 4, KJV, MATTHEW 28:20.

XV. REFERENCES

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3. "Collaborating With Chaplains to Meet Spiritual Needs." E. McClung, et al. MEDSURG Nursing, Vol. 15, No. 3, June 2006. Table 2, "FICA Spiritual Assessment Tool," p 154.
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