



# How Christian pharmacists can maximize their potentials in healthcare delivery: Adopting the prayer, faith, and action model

Melody Okereke<sup>a</sup>, Kenneth Bitrus David<sup>b</sup>, Ezeofor Ozioma Onyedikachukwu<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> BPharm, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

<sup>b</sup> BPharm, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Kaduna State University, Kaduna, Nigeria.

<sup>c</sup> PharmD, Faculty of Pharmacy, Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus

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## Abstract:

In the absence of scientific breakthrough, patients search for solutions beyond science in the quest for good health. This is because spirituality greatly influences therapeutic outcomes and healthcare delivery. Healthcare providers must confront the dual needs of their patients; spiritual and health. Christian pharmacists can have an integral role to play in addressing these needs by means of a specialized focus on Christian faith. In this paper, we propose a Prayer, Faith, and Action Model for pharmacists who desire faith-based healthcare delivery in their professional settings. This model is worth adopting if Christian pharmacists want to maximize their potential in the course of healthcare delivery.

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**Key words:** spirituality, Christian, pharmacist, healthcare, faith, prayer, healing

## Introduction

The saying “health is wealth” is not a cliché because in the absence of good health, everything else collapses. Although the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity,” several Christian associations, like the World Council of Churches, have described health in a way that encompasses the spiritual dimension of health as essential.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the Christian faith, the latter definition is more tenable. In the pursuit of good health, people resort to different kinds of interventions, some highly beneficial, others, not so much. In the quest for good health and absent scientific justification, people search for spiritual solutions.

Although there has not been a universal definition to the term spirituality, most of the definitions place emphasis on transcendence.<sup>2</sup> One definition consistent with many other definitions is the one by Koenig and colleagues:

It is a state distinguished from other things — humanism, values, morals and mental health — by its connection to the transcendent. The transcendent is that which is outside of the self and yet also within the self — and in Western traditions is called God, Allah, HaShem, or a Higher Power and in Eastern traditions is called Ultimate Truth or Reality, Vishnu, Krishna, or Buddha. Spirituality is intimately connected to the supernatural and religion, although also

extends beyond religion (and begins before it). Spirituality includes a search for the transcendent and so involves traveling along the path that leads from non-consideration to a decision not to believe to questioning to belief to devotion to surrender.<sup>3</sup>

Religion is one area where most people find spirituality. Music, the arts, nature, sets of values, or a quest for scientific truths are other areas where some people find it expressed.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, spirituality is in the context of religion: believing in the power of a supernatural supreme being or God. Various studies have shown how spirituality affects the health of patients<sup>5,6,7</sup> and how prayer heals the body of pain and diseases.<sup>8,9</sup> Even though proving the effectiveness of faith healing can be difficult, there is evidence that a significant number of patients resort to faith healing practices when faced with ill-health with many positive outcomes.<sup>6,8</sup> Although the way that spirituality affects physical health cannot be emphatically explained, it is believed that the spirit, mind, and body are connected, and the health of one affects the rest.<sup>6</sup> Healing is from within and involves all three sources. Spiritual health has a way of keeping the physical body healthy as well.

The Bible, the anchor book for Christians, has a lot to say about healing. The faith model is simply receiving healing through a prayer of faith. This can be as simple as believing that God exists and has the ability to heal. It may even be the faith of friends, family, or a healthcare provider and not necessarily that of the patient. As a healthcare provider, one should be equipped with the competencies required to administer a spiritual solution because we can only give out of the abundance of what we possess. Patients in need of healthcare services should have their spiritual needs addressed as these needs can potentially affect therapeutic outcomes.

## The Importance of Addressing the Spiritual Needs of Patients

Wisdom divinely given to man has contributed remarkably to the growth and advancement of modern medicine. Consequently, faith-based healing does not oppose the mechanism of modern medicine, and it is paradoxical to assume that consulting modern medicine is contrary to the Christian faith. Because spiritual beliefs affect health, influence therapy, and affect treatment choices, the spiritual convictions of healthcare providers have a role in therapeutic management.<sup>5</sup> In this scenario, pharmacists are not an exception. Although spirituality is an important factor in the health of the patients, it is often times neglected.<sup>10</sup> Up to 77 per cent of patients want their spirituality to be considered part of their medical and pharmaceutical care; however, only about 10 to 20 per cent of pharmacists discuss the issues of spirituality with their patients.<sup>11,12</sup> As a result of a growing interest in the aspect of spirituality, courses related to spirituality have been included in the curriculum of nearly 80 percent of medical schools in the United States of America (USA).<sup>4</sup> However, only about 21% of pharmacy schools offer spirituality training in the USA with a lower percentage in Africa.<sup>11</sup> The pharmacist has a responsibility to make the patient aware of some practices or products that may interfere with spiritual beliefs, such as where religious beliefs forbid patients from using products manufactured from animal sources. The pharmacist should assess the spiritual status of the patient by asking questions like: “Do you have any religious or spiritual beliefs that I need to be aware of as your pharmacist that might affect how you take your medications?” These arguments illustrate how important to understand the patient’s spiritual history regarding medication use and adherence.

## The Role of Christian Pharmacists in Faith-Based Healthcare Delivery

Pharmacists are some of the most trusted healthcare professionals accessible to the patient even in crises.<sup>13,14</sup> They have a cardinal position for interacting with patients in meeting their drug-related needs. One important factor affecting the quality of therapeutic outcomes is spirituality.<sup>5</sup> Impairment of outcomes and disease detection are apparent when spirituality and healthcare conflict. Spirituality influences the way patients and pharmacists interact. Spirituality matters to pharmacists both in their private and professional lives as it guides their practice, and this affects the holistic wellbeing of the patient. It has a role to play in the patients' ability to use and comply with prescribed dosage regimen. As the role of the pharmacist shifts from a product-oriented dispenser to an information-focused and patient-centred healthcare provider, the pharmacist collaborates with other members of the healthcare team to improve the patient's quality of life.<sup>13</sup> This change in role provides opportunities for addressing the role of spirituality in pharmaceutical care.<sup>12</sup> Pharmacists and pharmacy students need to be educated on the concept of spirituality and how it affects their practice as pharmacists. A tenable approach is by adding courses that place emphasis on spirituality and health to the curriculum of pharmacy students and also in the Mandatory Professional Continuing Educational (MPCE) courses for practicing pharmacists. There have not been any studies to assess the willingness of pharmacists to pray with patients if asked. However, from practice, there had been pharmacists who routinely prayed for and with their patients. This has, in most cases, helped relieve anxiety from the patient, giving them a feeling of hope.<sup>15</sup> Christian pharmacists can maximize their potential by utilizing counseling sessions to share the gospel with their patients (Matthew 28:19). Here, the relationship between prayer, faith, and healing would be made known to the patient and how these

can be blended with the medical care that they receive.

Numerous debates have been going on in the scientific community regarding the effectiveness of faith in the healthcare delivery process. However, faith-based healthcare delivery has been experienced in different healthcare settings.<sup>7,16</sup> To ensure a corresponding outcome in the delivery of pharmaceutical care, Christian pharmacists must draw insights from these experiences.

## Lessons from Faith-Based Healthcare Delivery in Other Healthcare Settings

In the long history of medicine, health and healing have been interpreted in a number of contexts. Throughout history, spiritual purpose has been a matter of little or no consideration. Yet when viewed through the prism of world religions, healers as well as the sick, have demonstrated a keen interest in the integral roles of faith in the healing process. The convergence of faith and medicine is experiencing a transition, with more attention to spiritual considerations as modern scientific theories and practices are called into question.<sup>17</sup> More broadly, several scientists still hold the opinion that faith has no effect on health outcomes but is this entirely true?<sup>17</sup> Contrary to the popular perspective, the reality is that in various healthcare settings, faith has contributed remarkably to healing and recovery processes. For instance, in nursing, faith-based care has been fully recognized as a central and essential element.<sup>16</sup> It was considered the pillar of nursing care by scholars such as Florence Nightingale and Jean Watson.<sup>16</sup> In a model case highlighted by Ramezani and colleagues, an eight-week preterm baby admitted in a neonatal intensive care unit was being fed through a nasogastric tube (NGT) by the mother under the supervision of a staff nurse.<sup>16</sup> In the nurse's absence, the mother fed the baby independently through a displaced NGT, and consequently, the baby's chance of survival was uncertain. Scientifically, the recovery or healing process was unattainable. However, the nurse

practiced her Christian faith by encouraging the mother to “Rely on God.” This faith model was adapted for similar cases in the hospital whose recoveries and healings were miraculous and beyond the explanation of science. Faith-based care results in beneficial outcomes such as healing, psychological adjustment, patients’ happiness, fostering of nurses’ spiritual awareness, and work satisfaction. The provision of faith-based care allows patients to recover and preserve the integrity of their health.<sup>16</sup> These experiences have also been witnessed in the care of cancer patients,<sup>10</sup> and pharmaceutical care should not be an exception.

### Integrating Prayer, Faith and Action into Pharmaceutical Care

Emerging global health challenges call for the full engagement and active participation of all relevant stakeholders, including Christian healthcare providers.<sup>1</sup> In order to enhance the health outcomes of patients, Christian pharmacists should not be an exception. There is nevertheless much more that can be done to improve the quality of pharmaceutical care provided by Christian pharmacists. While the pharmacy profession is a high calling, applying the doctrines of Christianity, prayer and faith, is a higher calling when focused on healthcare delivery. As Christian pharmacists, biblical principles and values influence the decisions being made in professional settings. For Christian pharmacists, ethics influence the way patients are counseled or how medications are dispensed. In addition to that, stories of faith can serve as a beacon of hope to encourage real-life applicability.

After being transferred to a Chinese tertiary teaching hospital for his clinical internship, Guy-Armel Bounda, a clinical pharmacist, shared how his fervency in several weeks of prayer helped him to pull down several barriers that affected the healthcare delivery process in the hospital.<sup>15</sup> The prayer strengthened his faith as well as that of his surgical patients, and their health experienced a miraculous improvement and recovery. While

prayer is a tool with healing and life-changing benefits, Christian pharmacists should also be reminded that “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). A hands-on approach during healthcare delivery/pharmaceutical care is further necessary after prayer and faith have been practiced, as prayer and faith are two complementary processes. Consequently, and as we have been assured, the patient will enjoy good health even as the soul is getting along well (3 John 1:2), and God will bring health and healing; and let them enjoy abundant peace (Jeremiah 33:6).

### Conclusion

As healthcare providers, Christian pharmacists can maximize the healthcare delivery process by adopting the Prayer, Faith, and Action model if unprecedented recoveries and healings are desired within the healthcare environment.

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**Correspondence:** Melody Okereke, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. [melokereke30@gmail.com](mailto:melokereke30@gmail.com)

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