





The Role of Spirituality in the Healthcare of the Aged: A Case Study of Elderly Health Care at the Agogo Presbyterian Hospital - Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Religion/spirituality has been known to be an essential part of human life. Besides supporting life challenges, spirituality does give structure, meaning and the needed understanding of day-to-day life issues. Studies confirm the hugely positive results that spirituality has on human health, especially in enhancing total well-being and quality of life. This benefit is particularly seen in the life of the elderly. For these older persons, spiritual disciplines like prayers, scriptures and music have been identified as helpful resources for their healthcare. It becomes a worrying situation when these persons who are naturally inclined to spirituality do not get these resources as a compliment to their care in an organized manner in Ghana. This issue occasioned an investigation that sought to harness the potentiality of some of these spiritual disciplines as a resource in complimenting the health of the elderly. In this paper, through SPSS, data generated from the questionnaires were chronologically arranged thematically. An empirical analysis followed which takes cognizance of interviews with healthcare personnel in Agogo Presbyterian Hospital. The result showed that there is evidence of spirituality among the aged when they are in a state of ailment. Their unflinching source of hope, strength and peace in God is made manifest amidst the discomfort that characterizes being aged coupled with ill health. Religious doctrines also affect health and health behaviour via an exposition of the scriptures during devotions at the hospital. Music ministered to the sick aged was also found to bring a feeling of nostalgia while reducing their level of anxiety. The study revealed that when the aged are devoted to prayer, it raises their level of optimism. Doctors, therefore, need to focus on emotional conditions for better health outcomes. The paper concluded by making a case for an integration of spirituality/religion into the healthcare plan of the aged. This will see clinicians giving room to aged religious/spiritual preferences to be considered as part of their therapy in Ghana.

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INTRODUCTION

Although health and spirituality can be considered as two distinct disciplines, they can converge to unleash holistic care on a human being who is not just made of body, but embodied in a soul as well as a spirit. It becomes a matter of necessity that in securing the well-being of the total human person,

spirituality (which in this instance encompasses the meaning of existence, the presence of being in the world, the experience of interconnectedness and inner peace), is well emphasized.¹ Words that are usually associated with spirituality are religion and religiosity. However, Nishant Irudayadason argues that these two words are not sufficient to define spirituality and it can be said that every person has a spiritual dimension, whether or not he or she has a religious affiliation.² Spirituality has become the operational word of influence for which the health of a person whether infant, adolescent, youth, or the aged cannot be neglected. Religiosity or religion and spirituality are therefore used interchangeably in this paper.

The care of the aged becomes relevant as it has generally been known that as people get older they turn to lay much emphasis on their spirituality. Along this aging process, health becomes a challenge for the aged. One cannot imagine the high quality of life that could be offered to these aged if their affinity for spirituality is enhanced and integrated within a quality health care plan. This study which falls under the health and spirituality of the aged has gained prominence in the area of medicine with scholars using their scientific lenses in making their submissions. This research however is coming from a religious background to make a case on how spirituality/religion can be a major boost in enhancing the life and well-being of the aged. It focused on the following spiritual activities; prayer, study of the scriptures, and listening to music and their effect on the health care of the aged. The study targeted both medical professionals and elderly patients at Agogo Presbyterian Hospital³ through interviews and the use of questionnaires respectively.

The Spirituality of the Aged

Recent research has come to prove that the spirituality of the aged contributes largely to their health which invariably enhances their quality of life. Joanna Malone and Anna Dadswell acknowledge the fact that spirituality generally plays various roles in the lives of the aged. It provides strength and hope when difficult situations arise. Engaging in spiritual activities has also been found to provide a sense of belonging to older adults.⁴ According to Harriet Mowat and Maureen O'Neil, ageing is a journey which includes a spiritual dimension. In other words, a meaningful discussion on ageing cannot be done without including spirituality. They, therefore, explain the spiritual dimension as that which focuses on the meaning of life, hope, and purpose explored through a relationship with others, with the natural and the transcendence.⁵ The aged in this case cannot live a prolonged life of enduring challenges of pain and deterioration of health. Meanwhile, their natural adherence to their faith and spirituality remains a valuable asset to improving their wellbeing. What spiritual resources are available for their utilization in a clinical set-up? How can their spirituality be improved to make their lives better and promote quick recovery from ill-health?

Spiritual disciplines in Christianity are devotional habits that have been practiced over time by the people of God. These disciplines are known to promote spiritual growth among them.⁶ It is these disciplines that research has proven to be an efficacious resource to the healthcare of the aged.⁷ Key among them are prayers, the scriptures and songs. These are subsequently discussed.

¹Nishant Irudayadason A, "Exploring the nexus between spirituality and health", *MedCrave*, 3 no. 2 (2018): 34.

²Irudayadason, "Exploring the Nexus between Spirituality and Health," 34.

³The Agogo Presbyterian Hospital is Ghana's oldest mission hospital, having been established on March 21, 1931, by the Basel Mission.

⁴Joanna Malone and Anna Dadswell, "The Role of Religion, Spirituality and/or Belief in Positive Ageing for Older Adults", *Geriatrics* (Switzerland) 3, no. 2 (2018): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/geriatrics3020028>.

⁵Harriet Mowat, and Maureen O'Neill. "Spirituality and ageing: Implications for the care and support of older people," *Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services*, 2013, accessed February 21, 2021

<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/insights/spirituality-ageing-implications-care-support-older-people>

⁶Donald Whitney, S. *Spiritual disciplines for the Christian life*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., (2014), 4.

⁷Harold G. Koenig, et.al. "Religion, spirituality, and health in medically ill hospitalized older patients." *Journal Of The American Geriatrics Society*, 52, no. 4 (2004): 554-562.

Prayer

Prayer seems to be effective in the care of the aged and is most central among the spiritual disciplines. This is because it ushers one into personal communion with God. Prayer from Latin origin has two different forms establishing its meaning; *prex*, and *précis*. This means supplication, the vows and wishes to a superior that surpasses the physical space.⁸ There are several types of prayers that literature has identified to help alleviate the suffering of the elderly. Intercessory and petition prayers are the most common ones in this regard. There is no direct contact when it comes to intercessory prayer, here the one begging God (intercessor) and the one in need of the prayer may not be in connection. In petition prayer, on the other hand, it is the one in need who asks God for help directly.⁹ Walker et.al in their findings on the efficacy of prayer indicates that private prayer, when measured by frequency, is usually associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety.¹⁰ Prayer whether personal or corporate or praying for the elderly comes with positive outcomes. Personal prayer can help evoke a relaxation mode, which can reduce one's own stress, while praying for a loved one or friend may provide emotional or spiritual support that reduces his or her stress.¹¹

The Scriptures

The scriptures in a religious setup such as in Christianity are divinely inspired words from God that have authority on the life and conduct of members. It is filled with rules and regulations (doctrine) about how to live and treat others in a community. When people abide by these orders stipulated in the word of God, studies show that it reduces stress. In light of this, stressful events in life such as divorce, financial challenges and difficulties with children which minimize positive emotions and increases negative one are sometimes averted. Through the exposition of the word of God, an aged person is helped to avert some of these challenges. The word of God also emphasizes showing love to others, and acts of kindness. Koenig indicates that these prosocial activities have many positive effects that help reduce stress and lead to human support which is very beneficial during difficult times, especially in moments of ill health and old age.¹²

Music

It has been observed that music is good for everyone, and it is therapeutic for some especially the elderly. In western countries, for instance, nursing homes, hospices and residential homes for the elderly have made provisions for the patients to enjoy soothing and uplifting music.¹³ This practice is a common thing out there but is very rare in Ghana. Individuals better enjoy music when they are in a relaxed mode. Hence when elderly persons are sick and are placed in this relaxed posture, they can heal better. Their healing is also made feasible by the fact that music improves their immunity. According to research, as people's stress levels decrease, their immune systems respond positively, and this is because their bodies are under less pressure to use energy on coping with pain and sickness, leaving more energy for healthy functioning. When people concentrate on hearing music, they stop

⁸Emilia Campos De Carvalho et.al. "The effect of prayer on patients Health: Systematic Literature Review." *Religions* 7, no. 1 (2016): 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7010011>

⁹ De Carvalho et.al , "The Effect of Prayer on Patients '.

¹⁰ Claire Hollywell and Jan Walker, "Private Prayer as a Suitable Intervention for Hospitalised Patients : A Critical Review of the Literature," *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 18 no. 5 (2009): 637-51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2008.02510.x>.

¹¹ Nadine Gaab, Gottfried Schlaug, and Lisa Wong, "Music as Medicine: The Impact of Healing Harmonies," *Longwood Seminars*, 2015, 1–46, https://hms.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/assets/Sites/Longwood_Seminars/Longwood_Seminar_Music_Reading_Pack.pdf. 10.

¹² Harold G. Koenig, "Religion, Spirituality, and Health: The Research and Clinical Implications," *ISRN Psychiatry* (2012): 7, <https://doi.org/10.5402/2012/278730>.

¹³IPNOS, "Eight Ways Music is Therapeutic for Old Age and Illness", April 2016 <https://www.ipnos.com/blog/music-therapy-sick-aging/>, accessed August 13, 2021.

focusing on their ailments and anxieties, and they begin to feel better.¹⁴ Also, fragile elderly folks benefit from the mental and physical stimulation provided by music. Music can be an art of healing for older persons, by offering cardiovascular exercise, when enjoying the community experience of singing or simply meditating on a music recording.¹⁵ The exercise is far beyond the heart, the entire body goes through a form of aerobics through dancing which is generated through music and this is of immense benefit to the health of the elderly.

METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to find an empirical relationship between health and spirituality, and to verify how prayer, scriptures, and music boost the health of elderly persons, the researcher analysed data based on a study of 50 aged persons, who are 60 years and above, who were on admission at the Agogo Presbyterian Hospital. For each of these aged persons, a semi-structured questionnaire, with partially structured questions was administered to them with the assistance of the nurses on duty. The questionnaire included both FICA and HOPE questions, and spiritual assessment tools used to determine the spirituality of persons in a medical setting.¹⁶ The FICA category elicited answers from aged spirituality based on their; Faith and belief, Importance, Community and Address in care. The HOPE category also demanded answers from the respondents by the use of similar approaches such as; sources of hope, organized religion, personal spirituality and practices and effects on medical care and end-of-life issues. A combination of these tools revealed not only the spirituality of the aged but also the role of spirituality in the healthcare of the aged. A quantitative approach to this research had the sole aim of verifying the theory of health and spirituality among the aged.

Interviews were also conducted with eleven (11) health professionals who have direct engagement with the aged at the hospital. These included five medical officers, five nurses and one chaplain. The medical officers consisted of; one psychiatrist, one surgeon and two general doctors and the medical administrator of the hospital. The nurses were also grouped as; one public health nurse and four general nurses who are always in close contact with the aged in the wards. Finally, the researcher made use of other secondary sources of information which included published literature in the field of health and spirituality of the aged. The results of the field study and discussion are presented below.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Source of Hope

| Items | Responses | |
|--|-----------|---------|
| | F(50) | P(100%) |
| Have you ever received medical care before in this hospital? | | |
| Yes | 50 | 100 |
| No | 0 | 0 |
| How long have you been seeking medical care in this facility? | | |
| Less than 5 years | 7 | 14 |
| 6-10 | 8 | 16 |
| 11-15 | 7 | 14 |
| 16-20 | 3 | 6 |

¹⁴IPNOS, "Eight Ways Music is Therapeutic for Old Age and Illness".

¹⁵Jeannette Sorrell and Jeanne M. Sorrell, "Music as a Healing art for Older Adults", *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 46 no. 3 (2008): 5.

¹⁶Aaron Saguil and Karen Phelps. "The Spiritual Assessment." *American Family Physician* 86, no. 6 (2012): 546-550.

| | | |
|---|----|----|
| 21 and above | 25 | 50 |
| God is my source hope, strength, comfort and peace. | | |
| Strongly Agree | 41 | 82 |
| Agree | 7 | 14 |
| Uncertain | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 2 | 4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| I hold on to God during difficult times like ill health or being aged. | | |
| Strongly Agree | 38 | 76 |
| Agree | 10 | 20 |
| Uncertain | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 2 | 4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| | | |

Source: fieldwork (2021)

Table 1 above indicates that all the aged /respondents have received medical care at the hospital thus amounting to 100%. This implies that the majority of the respondents have been seeking medical care at the hospital for a long period. Again, out of 50 aged persons, the majority of them strongly agree that God is their source of hope, strength, comfort and peace, and they hold on to God during difficult times like ill health.

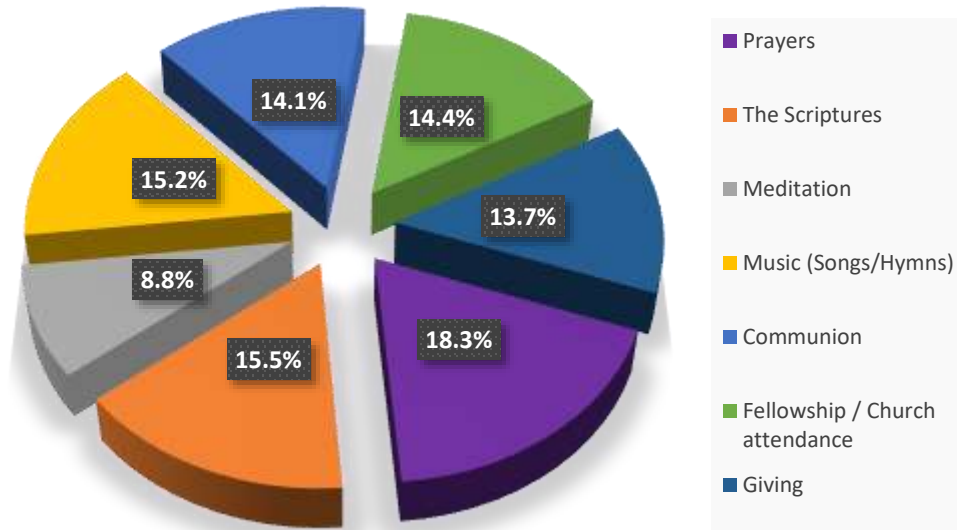
Table 2: Impact of Religious Community

| Items | Responses | |
|--|-----------|---------|
| | F(50) | P(100%) |
| Are you part of a religious or spiritual community (Church)? | | |
| Yes | 49 | 98 |
| No | 1 | 2 |
| Do you receive help from your religious or spiritual community? | | |
| Yes | 48 | 96 |
| No | 2 | 4 |
| This religious community helps you in the following ways. | | |
| I enjoy a sense of belongingness | 40 | 21.1 |
| I am imparted by the prayers | 44 | 23.7 |
| I am imparted by the word of God | 41 | 22.04 |
| I enjoy the fellowship of fellow Christians | 39 | 20.96 |
| I am financially supported | 22 | 11.8 |
| Others(specify) | 0 | 0 |
| | | |

Source: fieldwork (2021)

Table 2 above also shows that the majority of respondents belong to a religious group and in this case a church. They also agreed that they received the needed support from their religious organizations. The support is in the form of prayer mostly and word exposition. This brings about a sense of belongingness.

Figure 2: I Find These Spiritual Practices Or Aspects Of Spirituality Most Helpful To Me In The Course Of My Healthcare.



Source: fieldwork (2021)

From figure 2, various spiritual exercises undertaken by Churches and Religious Leaders were mentioned as being key to the upkeep of the aged at the Hospital. The key activities that stood out were Prayer, Word Exhortations and Music.

The Evidence of Spirituality of the Aged

As the data indicated, the majority of respondents strongly agreed that their source of hope, strength, comfort and peace is God. They also pointed out they hold on to God during difficult times like ill health or being aged. Moreover, it was discovered from the study that the majority of the aged are part of a religious or spiritual community they further affirmed that they receive assistance from this religious community they belong to. Among the help being offered to them includes; impartation by prayers, and the word of God. They further enjoy a sense of belongingness, fellowship as well as financial support in that order. Being vulnerable, it is clear that these aged at this point in life have a strong allegiance to God and the church. Their spirituality is evidential as they satisfy an “intrapersonal and metaphysical relationship with a higher power or transcendent force which provides motivation, purpose, and a sense of connectedness with others.”¹⁷ The higher power or transcendent force is their belief in God, which is unflinching even in difficult times of illness, and in this state of being aged. The transcendent connection compels them to relate to others, which in this case is the church. The fellowship of the church uniquely binds members to each other, and it is within this fraternity that these aged have also aligned themselves. Once they hold onto God in moments like this, it depicts they are spiritual. This is because spirituality also refers to what one holds most dear, which has more to do

¹⁷Shikha Makkar and Monika Saini. "Spirituality, ethical behaviour and corporate social responsibility-the influence of affinity." *New Horizons for Leveraging Business* 1 (2016): 1-19.

with his or her qualitative and emotional experiences and has become a value system for him or her.¹⁸ These aged have churned out their hope and faith in God to the extent of forming a value system that they cannot leave without. In finding meaning and purpose in life, a moment of sickness provides the answers, and for the one who has lived long enough in life, such answers come by easily. He or she understands life and the place of spirituality becomes a blessing.

Again, one can consider these aged to be enjoying spiritual wellbeing. Fisher provides four domains that denote spiritual wellbeing; personal, communal, environmental and transcendental domain. The personal domain is where a person intra-relates with self; the communal domain, with in-depth interpersonal relationships; the environmental domain, connecting with nature; the transcendental domain, relating to something or someone beyond the human level.¹⁹ These aged persons despite their fragile state have their source of strength and comfort in God, indicating their personal composition in this transcendent God, environmentally sustained by the known African interest in nature. The question that remains is; ‘how can this spiritual wellbeing of the aged be enhanced so that it can be translated into their physical health?’ Certain disciplines in the Christian milieu ought to be investigated to harness their potential.

Some Spiritual Disciplines/ Resources and their Role in the Healthcare of the Aged.

Some doctors, having accepted their limitation on the care of the aged consider the expression of spirituality as a huge buffer to their scientific knowledge. In instances where they have been courageous to inform some of the aged of the worsening state of their conditions, they have resorted to their spirituality, which is a reserve. Most of the elderly affirmed that they have personal spiritual beliefs and also possess some spiritual practices or aspects of spirituality that are most helpful to their healthcare. These practices are referred to as the disciplines or resources that have been acknowledged to be supportive of the care of the aged by health professionals. Through observation, various health workers contacted in this study have realized the importance of spirituality and seen some of the disciplines to be helpful in the medical care of the aged. The aged rated prayers as the most helpful spiritual resource to their healing course, followed by the scriptures, then music (songs/hymns). The rest are church attendance, Holy Communion, giving and meditation in that descending order. A brief discussion on the efficacy of the first three in the healthcare of the elderly is presented below.

The Efficacy of Prayer to the Healthcare of the Aged

In figure 2 above, out of the 50 respondents, 49 of them cited prayer as a supportive tool in their healthcare. Interestingly, during the interviews, most of the health workers in this study also affirmed this assertion of prayer. Intercessory prayer and petition prayers have found their place in this research where health workers admitted to their positive impact on the health recovery of the aged. A surgeon at the hospital asserted that elderly patients who are fond of praying and were serious about their spiritual lives always look cheerful. They exude happiness and a sense of peace whenever they are about to undergo a surgical procedure. This posture in the end helps them in their recovery. He stated, “psychologically, it improves their wellbeing.”²⁰ He added that with this kind of reduced despair and worry, these aged persons eventually go home with joy even if they are not cured completely. Such patients are normally not bothered about the outcome of their medical tests because they believe at all costs God will heal them since they have prayed. The medical administrator believed that this composure of the elderly resulting from their spirituality is of the essence to their care. His compliment comes from his understanding of sickness, and how to manage stress. Diseases are generally related to

¹⁸ Shikha Makkar and Ajay Kumar Singh, “Development of a Spirituality Measurement Scale,” *Current Psychology*, 40, (2021): 1490–1497, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-0081-7>.

¹⁹ John Fisher, “The Four Domains Model: Connecting Spirituality, Health and Wellbeing,” *Religion*, 2, (2011): 17–28, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel2010017>.

²⁰ Interview with a surgeon, Agogo Presbyterian Hospital, March 19, 2021

stress and stress worsens sickness. Hence, if a person has a spiritual background and knows that in times of stress he/she calls on God through prayer, they are able to bear the condition better.

According to the medical officers at the Hospital, most elderly patients become optimistic when they engage in prayer. Prayers go a long way to motivate them and have the potential to raise their hopes for the betterment of their health. Such prayers either be said by themselves or be prayed for by someone else. Sometimes, these aged express fear for their future when they come for medical consultation. When this is noticed, a doctor at this hospital usually sits them down and talks to them. It helps them build trust in God and they are thereafter prayed for. When this is done, the doctor realizes that it helps to improve the health of the aged. The prayer at the consulting room also gives them assurance that the medication given to them will be effective and hence they go home and comply with the prescription. The belief that God is a healer is a source of comfort to the elderly. They know that God will heal them and this is a good idea according to some of the health workers. How does this mentality of the aged help in their care? A doctor outlines the benefit.

“It helps in the sense that, when you end up as aged you are prone to some of these joint conditions. They are not things that can be cured so to say and we keep giving drugs to reduce the pain. Some of the medications we give here, they are just palliative care, just to help you and maintain you. So if somebody has faith especially in prayers, beyond what the drug can do, it goes a long way to help, they believe they can be healed, they believe that it will help and that boosts the effect of the drug and I think that this is helpful.”²¹

Another important aspect of Christian prayers is a confession of sins. This is scriptural as stated in James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.” It is further trumpeted in 1 John 1:9, thus “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Confession of sins either to man or to God has been seen to be therapeutic among the elderly. Some of the aged who visit the hospitals believe that what they are going through as ill health is because of a sin they have committed and are being punished for it. This mindset they have causes them to be depressed, especially when they are not able to confess and ask for forgiveness from God. If they are able to do so by asking for forgiveness or talking to a man of God, they inwardly get healed. The Psychiatrist acknowledged this act as a therapy to alleviate depression among the elderly.

In the Roman Catholic jurisdiction, this confession is institutionalized as part of the doctrines/statutes of the church, where adherents go to the parish to confess their offenses to God through the Parish Priest. Here in return, the Priest prays to God on behalf of the member and healing comes as stipulated in the scripture. But besides this miraculous response from God which is sometimes difficult to verify and controversial, the fact of confessing the guilt to God or the priest is enough as it helps these elderly to relax in life. Also, the idea of knowing that their sins have been forgiven aids them in psychological healing. This prevents premature death. Accordingly, the Sherwin prayer (from the Hebrew *‘le-hitpallel’* which is literally ‘to examine oneself’), can be a vehicle for introspection and a bridge between oneself and a higher power.²² It is during these confession moments that such an inquest into one’s life becomes possible.

The outcome of prayer is integral to having spirituality as a resource for the elderly in pursuit of care. It is being recorded that prayer may actually be the most traditional of therapies. Long before medicine had its wonder, prayer was almost the only medicine. In fact, it was the same person who dispensed medical care that provides spiritual care.²³ A prayer outcome that sometimes can be seen as

²¹Interview with a Medical Doctor, Agogo Presbyterian Hospital, April 7, 2021.

²² Hollywell and Walker, “Private Prayer as a Suitable Intervention for Hospitalised Patients : A Critical Review of the Literature, 638.

²³Rebekah Pratt, The Healing Power of Prayer: A Return to Spiritual Medicine, Spiritual Healing (drleannawolfe.com) Accessed 10/8/21.

a miracle is difficult to find its place in medical science yet a valuable relief to the aged. A nurse (name withheld) recounted how her prayer for an elderly proved fruitful resulting in what can be said to be a miracle;

“There was once a time when a patient on oxygen couldn’t pay anymore so we had to take him off oxygen. Doing that resulted in the patient having difficulty breathing and gasping for air. So I decided to check his pulse and see if he can survive without the oxygen, immediately I touched his hand and realized I was touching the vein that connects to his heart. Just then, I decided to pray for him (an elderly patient) instead. So I prayed for him asking God to heal any blockage causing the difficulty in breathing. After a few minutes of prayer, he started vomiting and spitting, and afterward, he could breathe freely.”²⁴

This is just one of the typical cases where the same dispenser of medicine becomes the dispenser of spiritual care. And enforcing the old mandate of using prayer as one of the therapies in the current terrain of healthcare.

Finally, the coping mechanism of spirituality that is reached through prayer cannot be understated when it comes to the healthcare of the aged. Through prayer, the aged come to an understanding of whatever situation they are experiencing concerning their health. They find it normal with their age and can bear the pain knowing that the rest of their lives are in the hands of God. According to Walker et.al, prayer that enhances coping action and facilitates Christian faith and well-being of the aged can take different forms.²⁵ Coping with an illness like cancer, pain, and life stress becomes bearable which in turn enhances a positive outlook and better quality of life. Finally, yet importantly, words of compliment, although not precisely a prayer has been seen to help imbibe hope in the elderly seeking healthcare. The elderly are encouraged when statements such as; “God bless you, God will do it, God is in control, let’s keep on praying, it will be well, etc, in the local dialect” are said to them by health workers. Through these statements, they keep trusting their caregiver and respond to instructions regarding their health gladly.

It is therefore suggestive that prayer as a non-pharmacological intervention and resource be included in the nursing holistic care aimed at elderly patients’ well-being. It is in view of all these that a trained chaplain has a task towards the elderly. By his or her training, he or she is well placed to offer spiritual care by providing the needed help to the elderly. The elderly who has issues with finding meaning in life, and coping with tremendous suffering could be immensely supported in utilizing their beliefs in helping them cope with illness. Similarly, a spirit-filled health worker who is trained can support this way of helping the aged.

The Efficacy of the Scriptures to the Healthcare of the Aged

The second spiritual resource that both the aged and health workers have found helpful to the care of the aged health is the use of the scriptures. The word of God has a key role in ensuring the health status of the aged. In Figure 3.2, out of the 50 aged persons investigated, 42 of them have found the use of the scriptures a means of facilitating their healing in a clinical setting. What effect do these scriptures have on the aged in the pursuit of healthcare? Within the confinement of the hospital, these aged were asked about the health implication of the morning devotions, which has much emphasis on the word God.

A greater number of the aged specified that the word of God is a source of encouragement, motivation and source of hope, peace, and comfort to them. Rightly so, these are what a troubling soul will yearn for and happily stay glued to. Hence, the scriptures are full of words of comfort and depending on whoever is interpreting them, will offer the needed gem for a wounded soul. From the researcher’s own observations during such devotions, typical messages that are given are mostly words of hope and the need to keep that hope alive in God. Moreso, the need to see God amid their sickness

²⁴ Interview with a Senior Registered General Nurse, Agogo Presbyterian Hospital, March 22, 2021.

²⁵ Hollywell and Walker, "Private Prayer as a Suitable Intervention for Hospitalised Patients."

and the fact that He does not desert them during crises is drummed home. These elders are made to see God as their ultimate healer who works through human hands thus via the health workers. These words not only get rid of fear and doubt but also establish their hearts in peace which is necessary before receiving a consultation from a doctor. An elated soul will embrace a discussion that bothers his or her health happily and this is an atmosphere every medical professional will cherish. At the Agogo Presbyterian Hospital, 30 minutes is designated every day of the week, except Sundays and Saturdays for morning devotions. Sundays are reserved for church services with those on admission who were also interviewed in this study.

Of equal importance is the fact that health personnel particularly doctors also become encouraged when the scriptures are preached to the elderly since it has been researched that religious doctrines affect decisions on health and health behaviours.²⁶ If an elderly patient's negative behaviour causes him or her any sickness, it becomes easy for the scriptures to correct him or her. The doctor only has to refer him to the preaching he or she has just heard. For instance, if the Bible declares that the Christian body is a temple of the Holy Spirit as stated in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, it becomes a strong admonition for any elderly who is an alcoholic and could be endangering his or her sugar level as a diabetic patient.

The scriptures prohibit behaviours that are harmful to the body, such as smoking which tends to damage the liver and other vital organs. Again, bodily exercise although profiteth a little as stated in 1 Timothy 4:8, is good for these elderly persons. So when expounded upon by a preacher during these devotions, it becomes a basis for a doctor to encourage the elderly to avoid a sedentary lifestyle. This 'no-exercise' attitude of the aged comes with health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, strokes, etc. Lastly, the scriptures warn against unhealthy diets and risky sexual behaviour. Although it is permissible to eat everything, not every diet will be good for a person at a certain age. An aged person will have to be discrete and selective in the choice of food to be eaten. Again, sex outside of marriage, multiple partners, etc which cause health challenges to the aged are well addressed by the scriptures. A good exposition on these topics during morning devotions by a preacher is a good omen not only for the aged but for the medical officer who delights in the wellbeing of the aged.

The aged among other reasons seem to have great hope in the word of God to offer them the needed miracle in the midst of their pains. This is very true as a nurse again narrated how the word of God preached in the corridors between the male and female wards at the hospital gave the expected miracle to an elderly person. She recounts:

"there was this elderly patient who had been on admission for a long time with cerebrovascular accident (CVA). One day we came to work and he said the Pastor who came to preach that day had really revived his spirit and so he believes he will be back on his feet strong again. Truly the man is back on his feet now and strong even as we are talking. An elderly patient who was on admission and not able to walk is now walking because his spirit was revived by the word of God."²⁷

This explains the power of the scriptures to elderly patients and is essential to them when they are sick. God's promise in Psalm 41:1-4 is surety for them. It reads as *"Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed. I said, 'LORD, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.'"*

The word of God is central to the spirituality of the aged and in effect boosts their healthcare when it is really quoted to them. There are specific bible passages that they can rely on, it gives them real hope and faith. Through such passages, they have come to terms with themselves. Some of the aged sometimes say they have to come to realize the importance of some specific prayers in the Bible

²⁶ Koenig, "Religion, Spirituality, and Health: The Research and Clinical Implications," 1-33.

²⁷ Interview with a Senior General Nurse, Agogo Presbyterian Hospital, March 19, 2021.

to give them faith when seeking medical care. An example of such prayers is what can be found in Psalm 31:9, 14-15 which reads: "9 Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; My eye wastes away with grief, Yes, my soul and my body! 14 But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."15 My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, And from those who persecute me" These scriptures with many others in the books of Psalms are encouraging in supporting the elderly during ill health.

The Efficacy of Music (Songs/Hymns) to the Healthcare of the Aged

When interrogated, both health personnel and the aged agreed on the values of music in their healthcare. The aged placed music as the third of the spiritual disciplines that contributes to their wellbeing whenever they are sick. In figure 2, 41 out of 50 responded to the fact these hymns/ songs are a vital tool for their healthcare. What is so unique about music and its therapeutic nature to the aged?

Music to the sick aged brings a feeling of nostalgia.²⁸ Certain songs heard in their ears take them back in time. This creates a feeling of romance and provides relief to them. The aging population easily responds to songs they first heard when young. Studies indicate that these songs lift their mood and influence their brain waves when they begin listening to such songs.²⁹ A Psychiatrist in an interview revealed that the involvement of the aged in dancing and singing and other church activities does not only give them a sense of purpose and belonging, it also helps revive them inwardly, raising their spirit, and thereby giving them the psychological and emotional strength needed to keep on living. Music is used to treat the aged who have depression by reaching out to their emotions and altering their mood.³⁰ It is in this regard that the morning devotions and church activities could be said to be a fruitful venture for the aged at the hospital. These worship centers are effective avenues where these aged get their souls lifted up via the choruses being sung. The aged who in most cases are battling chronic sickness with accompanying challenges of pains can boast of hymns of Presbyterian origin that soothe their pains. It has also been discovered that music numbs pains.³¹ Sometimes the aged have been seen to override their physical problems since through songs they have overcome the groaning pains by achieving a balanced walk and coordination. This they do amazingly by jumping to the dancing floor to dance to songs.

Also, some of these aged persons who were on admission and on their beds although unable to engage in this worship do enjoy the songs that emanate. Their healing process heightens since music promotes healing.³² A nurse admitted that a male elderly patient openly confessed that listening to hymns every day gave him hope and peace of mind. This was enough to have quickened his recuperation process at the hospital where during devotions and Sunday church services such songs are sung.

Again, it will interest one to know the compelling nature of music, especially when viewed in the corridors of the hospital during church services. The music alone during the service can bring people together with some of these fragile aged persons inclusive. Studies reveal that when music is creative, it is able to easily stir the artistic part of the brain and one gets involved in the frenzy. This enhances rehabilitation.³³ As people get involved to enjoy music, it comes with additional benefits. This delightful atmosphere of unity which is created drives away loneliness and enhances the health of the aged.

²⁸William Forde Thompson and Gottfried Schlaug, "The Healing Power of Music", *Scientific American Mind*, 26, no. 2 (2015): 39.

²⁹Thompson and Schlaug "The Healing Power of Music" 34.

³⁰Gaab, Schlaug, and Wong, "Music as Medicine: The Impact of Healing Harmonies." 15.

³¹IPNOS, "Eight Ways Music is Therapeutic for Old Age and Illness".

³²Esther Goetz Gilliland, "The Healing Power of Music." *Music Educators Journal* 31, no. 1 (1944): 18.

³³Thompson and Gottfried "The Healing Power of Music", 35.

Finally, music has been researched and one of its benefits is to combat dementia.³⁴ This is one of the chronic diseases among the aged population. It is usually characterized by memory loss, difficulty in concentrating, and struggling to follow a conversation or find the right word. Music does not only revive old memories, but it does also come with new information which becomes essential for people suffering from dementia. This possibility is achieved in some aged persons as those who find it very difficult to listen to speeches, focus their attention on the music being played and this enhances their ability to enjoy the music.³⁵ Although this study did not focus on dementia (a common feature among the aged) it is expected that some of the aged might have been blessed through the songs sung during the corridor services of the hospital. The therapeutic potency of music to the care of the aged if well-constructed as part and parcel of their overall care in the hospital setting will go a long way to help them.

SUMMARY

The data collected during the field study synchronizes with the views of the literature reviewed that ageing is a phase that should involve spiritual activities. The spiritual activities discussed (prayer, scripture reading and music) go a long way to enhance the care of aged persons. These activities give meaning to life, offer hope and purpose, and when effectively explored through a relationship with others bridge the gap between the natural and the transcendence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that the Agogo Presbyterian Hospital balances its care of patients with spiritual care but it is not well integrated and specifically tailored towards the care of the aged. It is therefore recommended that the hospital considers an integrative approach with a keen focus on its aged patients. In reality, having geriatric units at various health facilities in Ghana will help effectively accommodate this integration of spirituality into the healthcare plan of the aged. With a particular interest in music and even prior to the creation of this unit. A public address system should be installed to play music at specific times in the wards to soothe the pain of patients and keep them relaxed. Similarly, a choir in the hospital or churches around can be encouraged to minister to these aged at specific times to be a blessing to their healthcare. Also, there is a need to understand that not all health professionals have pastoral education in the country and therefore may not have the skills and the competency on aged spiritual issues. Therefore in addressing spiritual issues, chaplains who have this training and education are to be employed to address simple spiritual problems that may crop up during aged care. This is a call to all government health facilities besides the CHAG³⁶ facilities where sometimes chaplaincy units do not even exist at all.

Moreso, spiritual growth which is keen on the survival of the aged must remain an ongoing process by the Churches in Ghana. It is upon this built-in spirituality that these frail older persons have remained resilient. Their journey to connect with God must be intact with accompanying spiritual disciplines forming the basis of their relationship with the divine. The churches knowing how these aged persons unflinchingly desire spiritual things, particularly prayer, can develop an intercessory prayer ministry to keep them engaged at all times. The intercessory prayer built around one of their interests, if adopted can further their personal growth and the growth of the entire church.

Finally, it would be ideal for the Ghanaian government to as a matter of necessity establish geriatric/gerontological schools for the training of nurses and other allied staff for the care of the aged in Ghana. This has become necessary due to the rising level of the aged population in the country as a result of good medical care in recent times. These institutions will be fertile grounds for the study of

³⁴Orii McDermott, Martin Orrell and Hanne Mette Ridder, "The importance of music for people with dementia: the perspectives of people with dementia, family carers, staff and music therapists", *Aging & Mental Health*, 18 no. 6, (2014):706-716, DOI: 10.1080/13607863.2013.875124.

³⁵ McDermott, Orrell, and Ridder, "The Importance of Music for People with Dementia" 2.

³⁶Christian Health Association of Ghana; The Presbyterian Health Services is a member.

an integrated approach to aged care by caregivers. Through these institutions, the health and spirituality of the aged can be brought to the fore as an academic discipline.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, a broadly set out objective of finding out the role of spirituality in aged healthcare has been conducted. The spirituality of the aged is not in doubt, as their faith in God remains intact despite the prevalence of ill health at this stage. In this research also, three spiritual disciplines have been identified and examined to ascertain their efficacy in aged care. Prayers, scriptures and music (songs /hymns) are the main resources that are contributing immensely to the health of the elderly. An identifiable and alternative way of caring for the aged is to ensure enhancement in their spirituality. This has a positive outcome on their health. Aged spirituality is a gift from the creator and must be preserved by the church and valued in a clinical setting. The aged are known to be old but are not odd among human beings, therefore a high premium must be placed on their life. An excellent way to go as a nation is to develop a robust policy that will seek to address their needs in a holistic manner.

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