

Letter to Editor

Spirituality–religious technique is an effective intervention for improvement coping strategy in women with breast cancer in Iran

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Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women in the world, which is a serious problem in many developing countries. The prevalence of cancer in the world can be anticipated to increase and double by 2020; this is a very important issue for health care and women (1). In Iran, breast cancer is common among women representing 22.4% in 100000 women (2). Cancer can have many negative psychological consequences such as depression, sexual relationship problems, problems with significant others especially husband and children, isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, worry about future and health, hopelessness and helplessness, suicidal ideation, negative body image, and self-blaming, which affect their illness (3). Therefore, coping with this disease is an important challenge for patients.

Women with breast cancer have used varied strategies for coping with this disease according to their cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs (3). Spiritual and religious strategies can be identified in these patients including cognitive restructuring,

emotional expression, acceptance of the disease and its condition, raised religious practice, meaning of life, family and social support, yoga and exercise, remembering, praying, and meditation (4, 5). In some countries, such as western societies, coping strategies used by women may differ from those of the developing countries (6). For example, in developed countries, women are seeking family or social support, focusing on the cognitive problem solving and cognitive restructuring, which involve “cognitive escape-avoidance” and “behavioral escape-avoidance”. On the other hand, in the developing countries, women with religious beliefs consider cancer as something in God's hands, and believe that they have no control over cancer (7).

More than 80% of the studies published recently showed that religion and spiritual interventions could have a positive role on psychological or physical wellbeing in patients with cancer. The common cores of the association between religion and spirituality are the relationship with God (Allah), self, others, and the world.

Religious beliefs and practices could increase the sense of self efficacy and perceived sense of control that patients may feel about it. McIlmurray et al. showed that patients with religious beliefs, as compared with non-religious patients, experience lower levels of pain and distress. These studies have suggested religious and spiritual strategies to combat and cope with breast cancer (8).

Considering the several negative physical and mental consequences of cancer, women's coping strategies should be strengthened in order to make more adaptability with disease. Spirituality-religious approach is among the strengthening approaches in this field.

Many studies in Iran and the other countries showed the efficacy of spiritual-religious approach in accepting the disease, coping with it, reducing psychological pain, and increasing resilience of patients individually or together with other psychological interventions (6, 9). With regard to this issue, we suggest that spiritual approach, separately or together with other treatments, be used in patients with breast cancer.

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