Sacred health: Aligning cancer prevention with islamic teachings in Malaysia's multicultural context

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Malaysian late-stage cancer diagnosis rate (60%) reflects systemic barriers rooted in cultural and religious beliefs. Muslim communities navigate dual Islamic principles: viewing illness as divine tests while embracing treatment-seeking as prophetic guidance. This study explores how aligning cancer prevention with Islamic teachings can transform cultural resistance into health-promoting strategies. **Materials and Methods:** A 10-year review (2013–2023) analyzed Islamic health texts, cancer prevention studies in Muslim communities, and Malaysian Shari'ah guidelines. A cultural comparison framework identified key themes through textual analysis, validated by cross-referencing rulings from Islamic authorities (e.g., Negeri Sembilan Shari'ah Council). **Results:** 1. Cultural barriers: - Screening is perceived as a challenge to Allah's plan, but this is countered by Qur'an 2:195 ("Do not destroy with your own hands"). - Reluctance to undergo gender-sensitive screening, especially among rural women. - Limited access to cancer prevention education in underserved areas. 2. Religious Affirmation: - The Shariah Council ruling links early screening to the protection of life- a principle of Islam. - The Malaysian Islamic Medical Council viewed the medical checkup as a sign of compliance with the Prophet. 3 Successful interventions: A pilot intervention with a group of Muslim women in mosques in the United States proved that nearly 40% of Muslim women received a mammogram within 12 months of the intervention. Discussion Integration Strategies: -Collaborate with clergy to develop cancer prevention promotional materials. - Train women's health counselors to address privacy barriers and conduct outreach in rural areas. - Embed screening activities into Ramadan sermons and shape early detection into "Hari Raya purification rituals" This approach centered on Malaysian Islamic teachings, demonstrates how cultural barriers themselves can be turned into tools for cancer prevention, thus providing a new paradigm for non-biomedical interventions in oncology prevention.

Keywords: Islamic teachings-health promotion alignment, religiously-empowered screening interventions, culturally-sensitive health communication, mosque-led community health initiatives, non-confrontational cancer prevention paradigms