

# Experiences of Muslim Cancer Survivors Living in the United States

Fawwaz Alaloul, PhD, MSN, MPH, RN, Barbara Polivka, PhD, RN, FAAN, Sadaf J. Warraich, MBBS, MPH, and Michael A. Andrykowski, PhD

**PURPOSE:** To gain an understanding of the cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship experiences of adult Muslim cancer survivors residing in the United States.

**PARTICIPANTS & SETTING:** A purposive sample of 17 male and 15 female Muslim cancer survivors was recruited from across the United States. Data on Muslim cancer survivors' experience were collected through individual, in-depth, semistructured interviews.

**METHODOLOGIC APPROACH:** An interpretive, descriptive, qualitative approach was used to gain an understanding of the experience of Muslim cancer survivors.

**FINDINGS:** Six broad themes were identified to gain an understanding of the cancer experiences of adult Muslim cancer survivors residing in the United States: (a) cancer experience based on their belief in God, (b) hiding cancer diagnosis, (c) perceived strong social support, (d) making an effort to keep up with religious practices, (e) perceived discrimination in healthcare settings, and (f) importance of religion and cultural awareness.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING:** This study provided key information concerning the unique experience of Muslim cancer survivors residing in the United States. Identifying, understanding, and meeting survivors' religious needs, as well as understanding their cancer experience, may reduce cancer health disparities and enhance health outcomes.

**KEYWORDS** Muslim cancer survivors; survivorship; Islam; religious needs

**ONF, 48(5), 546-557.**

**DOI** 10.1188/21.ONF.546-557

Muslims represent a large, rapidly growing segment of the population in many Western countries, including the United States. About 3.45 to 7 million Muslims reside in the United States (Mohamed, 2018; Padela & Curlin, 2013). By 2050, it is estimated that the Muslim population will reach about 8.1 million individuals (Mohamed, 2018). Therefore, health professionals in the United States will provide care to an increasing number of Muslim cancer survivors with distinct and unrecognized healthcare needs and outcomes related to their religious beliefs and cultural values.

## Background

The religion of Islam affects all aspects of a Muslim's life, including thoughts and behaviors regarding health, illness, and death (Wehbe-Alamah, 2008). Muslims believe that illness or wellness is God's will (Wehbe-Alamah, 2008; Zahr & Hattar-Pollara, 1998), and they receive illness and death with patience and prayers (Sirois et al., 2013; Wehbe-Alamah, 2008). The family system for most Muslims in Islamic countries is dominated by an extended structure (Daneshpour, 1998; Weatherhead & Daiches, 2010). According to Islam, it is important to visit someone who is ill in the hospital and/or at home (Padela, Killawi, et al., 2012; Wehbe-Alamah, 2008) and to make supplication for the sick (Padela, Killawi, et al., 2012). In supplication, a person can ask at any time for help and directions through private and humble conversation with the one who owns and creates everything (Kabbani, 2007). The religion of Islam and the nature of the family shape Muslims' beliefs and consequently may influence the way Muslim cancer survivors deal with their survivorship experience.

Cancer survivors experience physical, emotional, psychological, and social difficulties from cancer diagnosis and treatment (de Moor et al., 2013; Frenkel et al., 2015). These difficulties include fatigue, pain, fear