

Science and faith as applied to medicine: Adopting the middle path

Dear Editor,

Science and faith are essential routes that investigate the phenomenon of human life. While the former takes an objective view on life events, the latter is concerned with the subjective experiences of the individual. Both play major roles in the practice of medicine and the healing process of individuals.^[1] History of science has shown that understanding of human conditions and health were mostly under the realm of philosophers, saints, and thinkers, in earlier times.^[2] Later, developments in scientific approaches started to look for objective evidence.

Science refers to all the endeavors which attempt to study human life by scientific methods and approaches. Science is constantly in search of evidence, and as a result, it is concerned about 'absence of evidence'. Hence, science endeavors are directed toward generating evidence. As evidence keeps accumulating, faith questions science as to the meaning of the data and evidence generated. Faith asks science what is the knowledge that is gained by or inferred from the evidence. Faith is referred here in a broader sense to include all the perceptions and beliefs that are held by humans including religion and health.^[3] Faith is constantly in search of meaning. Since faith cannot be produced as evidence, it is criticized for 'evidence of absence'. Hence, it constantly looks for observations to show that evidence is present in the form of miracles or serendipity with hope.

"It is a common weekday opinion of the world that praying people are not practical", says Sir Francis Galton. From Thomas Browne in the 17th century, who wrote the *Religio Medici*, to Francis Collins, who was the recipient of the Templeton prize in 2020, there are not many who have made efforts in balancing both these endeavors. A detailed account focusing mainly on the close association between medicine and religion is provided by Jeff Levin in the recently published book (*Religion and Medicine: A History of the encounter between humanity's two greatest institutions*, Oxford University Press, Levin, 2020).

It is important to understand the implications of science and faith in matters related to medicine and health. For instance, breastfeeding of the infant by the mother

requires maternal–neonatal contact, which results in hormonal responses as explained by science.^[4] Faith on the part of the mother is also equally important. Hence, a failure of lactation can be owing to problems in either of these domains. One of the important causes of lactation insufficiency is the lack of faith as perceived by the mother.^[4] It is important for health professionals to consider the worldviews of patients as the healing process may require intervention by either of these means.

Science and faith provide complementary views on the phenomenon of life, health, and disease.^[5] It is essential to strike a middle ground between the two to acknowledge the merits of both. It would help in ensuring that appropriate education and health promotion are delivered to patients in clinical practice.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Received: 21-02-2024

Revised: 13-03-2024

Accepted: 03-04-2024

Published: 11-07-2024

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Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.jehp.net
	DOI: 10.4103/jehp.jehp_340_24

How to cite this article: Prakash SS. Science and faith as applied to medicine: Adopting the middle path. *J Edu Health Promot* 2024;13:244.

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