

The contemporary study of faith, health and medicine:  
Negation and affirmation via a historical perspective

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Some scientists believe that “religiousness” and “spirituality” cannot be studied in the same way as other universal aspects of the human existence, such as functional health and that we cannot assume that measures of religion/spirituality are applicable for all persons across all faiths. Given the very definition and function of empirical research and the underlying philosophy, we in part agree with this position. Yet, we still consider that empirical research on faith matters is valuable not least that leading scholars have suggest that faith-health area is the “genuine frontier for research.” In this presentation, we will delineate what is this area actually about on the basis of a historical and philosophical account. We will posit that it is important to understand the role of beliefs for the human condition in general and for individuals’ health, coping, and well-being in particular, especially for diverse and disadvantaged populations. We also propose the following remedies this challenges: (1) be open to multifaceted, positive, null, and negative effects of different faith factors, (2) understand the deeper historical and contemporary meanings of our findings, (3) develop cultural sensitive faith measures, demonstrate their psychometric properties, and use factor analysis to verify their usages in different faith traditions, and use an interdisciplinary approach with sound research design to reveal the true faith effect in medicine. Finally, it is advisable that multidisciplinary teams of investigators with expertise in theology, philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology study the phenomena related to religion and spirituality.