

# healing or cure?



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**Vongai Madanire** shares a case and some personal thoughts

## case history

*Janet<sup>1</sup> is a 46-year-old accountant, wife, and mother to one boy and four girls. In the late 1990s she was diagnosed with Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD). Subsequently, repeated blood tests have shown a gradual decline in her renal function, though she was clinically well and needed no hospital admissions. She remained on anti-hypertensives and calcium supplements.*

*A marked decline in her renal function arose when she became pregnant with her youngest daughter in 2005. A letter from her consultant two years later said that she had 6-18 months to live, needed a transplant, and needed to receive dialysis whilst waiting. She expected that the burden of medical intervention would diminish her quality of life immensely. Following careful research and discussions with people undergoing the proposed treatment, she was pleasantly surprised by her findings that patients were not riddled with pain in bed or debilitated. Nevertheless, to her this was not healing. Therefore she declined to undergo both dialysis and transplantation.*

*As a Christian, Janet continued to trust and pray for healing. More than three years later, she is still alive and well; enjoying her family and engaging in her normal daily activities (including full-time work). Though she dislikes going for follow up appointments, she always attends and reports that doctors are stunned by her good physical condition and well-being. They say the medical test results do not match the person in front of them.*

*Despite this, one of her consultants has recently asked to speak to her daughter who is a medical student to seek her opinion on her treatment and prognosis. The consultant says*

*Janet will probably not live to see her daughter graduate from medical school, and not live to be a mother to her now six-year-old daughter. The consultant thinks she needs a psychiatric referral because of the decision that she is making: 'choosing death rather than life'.*

## my reflection

The story above is that of a real patient; a mother of a friend who is a medical student. Having explored the subject of divine healing during her Diploma in Christian Ministry, she shared her reflections and struggles on the subject with me. In light of my own experience (of God's healing for various pains and ailments through prayer), I have found this story very real and my friend's reflections useful and interesting in many ways. It brings about many questions: What is healing? Does God heal today? If he does, does he heal some conditions and not others? Does he heal some people and not others?

Is it possible to be healed even when one still physically has a disease? Could Janet be in blissful denial, or just using prayer and faith as a crutch?

## cure and healing

Cure is different from healing. 'Cure' involves bringing a medical condition or disease process to an end, while 'healing' is a movement towards health, which can happen instantly or over time. Health is difficult to define. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.<sup>2</sup> This is useful, but does not reflect the importance of spirituality.

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. (Genesis 5:1b)

The Spirit of the Lord was upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor.

For all that we have received, we have received with thanksgiving, (1 Tim. 4:4)

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, (1 Tim. 4:4)

Perhaps the best all-encompassing definition views health as 'strength to be human'. Being human (and therefore healthy) can be described in terms of the relationship that one has with God, oneself, others and the environment. Ill-health would therefore arise when there are fractures and faults in these relationships.<sup>3</sup> Health is therefore linked to biblical concepts of wholeness and *shalom*.

God can bring about healing with physical cure through faith,<sup>4</sup> medicine or both. However some people can be cured without being

necessarily healed (for example a chest infection is cured, though the patient's relationship with God may not be healed). Equally, not everyone who is healed is physically cured. We live in a fallen world; full of evil, sickness, disease and death. The hope of a perfect state of health is in the promise of eternal union with God through Christ Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

Though Janet's renal function is now very poor, she believes she is healed and continues to pray for complete healing. I am not sure whether she means the same by healing as I suggest above, but I think it commendable that she has confidence that God has healed her (knowing fully that PKD is humanly incurable). She trusts that God will preserve her life until it's her appointed time to die, something that she will accept and peacefully rest in.

Janet is steadfast in her faith in God, and his sovereignty in determining what ultimately happens. Affirming her faith is not to say we should not take responsibility for our health wherever possible (indeed Janet still sees her doctors). We should of course keep physically healthy though exercising, seeking medical attention when necessary, and by learning how to deal with stress.

We should also build relationships with other people (for our psychosocial and emotional wellbeing) as well as nourish our spirits by reading the word of God and praying daily.

How will Janet's story affect my future practice?

We should be conscious of professional boundaries, the uncertainties and limits of medicine,

## Want to know more?



Andrew Fergusson's *Hard Questions About Health and Healing*, reviewed in *Nucleus* in July 2011, covers many of these issues in more depth. Normally priced at £8, it is available for just £4 on the CMF **12-12 scheme**.

[www.cmf.org.uk/students/1212.asp](http://www.cmf.org.uk/students/1212.asp)

and take care in carefully communicating with patients, trying to avoid bringing utter gloom or false hope. When a patient with capacity has sufficient information to make a decision, we should respect this, whether the choice has been made for religious or non-religious reasons (or both). Sometimes some patients' informed decisions will appear unwise or conflict with our clinical judgement and beliefs,<sup>6</sup> but patients are entitled to choose - even if it seems an 'unreasonable' demonstration of faith. Christians at all times however, ought not to 'be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

Janet's faith seems to enable her to do just that - God's peace has brought healing to her, even if not accompanied by cure. ■

### REFERENCES

- Names have been changed for anonymity.
- World Health Organisation. [bit.ly/mykQG8](http://bit.ly/mykQG8)
- Fergusson A. *Hard questions about Health and Healing*. London: CMF, 2005:33-50
- See Jesus' cleansing of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19
- Revelation 21:4
- Personal Beliefs and Medical Practice*. General Medical Council, 2008. [bit.ly/yRyjjn](http://bit.ly/yRyjjn)
- Philippians 4:6-7