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Religion and Spirituality as an Ethnomedical System in the Cancer Journey: A Global Synthesis

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ABSTRACT A cancer diagnosis constitutes a profound existential crisis that biomedicine is structurally limited to address, creating a clinical void. This systematic synthesis of over fifty global studies argues that patients instinctively activate Religion and Spirituality (R/S) not merely for psychological comfort, but as a coherent ethnomedical system. Guided by Geertz's theory of religion as a cultural system, the researchers demonstrate that R/S provides aetiologies (for example, divine test, fate) to diagnose the 'why' of suffering, a pharmacopoeia of therapeutics (for example, sacred bargaining, redemptive suffering, communal prayer) to restore order, and pathways to restorative outcomes (for example, meaning, resilience, buffered death anxiety). The findings compel a clinical paradigm shift, urging the ethical integration of this R/S ethnomedical framework into standard oncology to provide truly holistic, person-centred care that addresses the spiritual *dis-ease* of cancer.