

Spirituality and Religiosity in Cardiac Rehabilitation

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To The Editor

Spiritual and religious practices are often used to cope with illness across adult populations and may be associated with positive clinical outcomes and less disease progression.¹

Strong spiritual experiences in life may be a protective and positive factor in cardiovascular diseases. However, spirituality is often neglected in cardiac rehabilitation (CR) programs.² Some CR patients rely on their religious practices and spiritual beliefs to deal with the onset of and recovery from cardiac disease.³ Yet, the R/S of patients with heart disease and the role of R/S in coping with the illness are rarely discussed during participation in CR programs. 2, 3

A recently published study was set to evaluate the role of R/S in 105 individuals with a first-time myocardial infarction or coronary artery bypass surgery who were referred to a 12-week CR program.⁴ The demonstrated relationships between R/S and outcomes in cardiac patients support the development of spiritual care interventions for cardiac patients and evaluation of the impact of these interventions on medical, and psychological outcomes in these patients.⁴

Spiritual care interventions may not be a universal intervention for CR programs and may not be applicable, or even appropriate for some patients. It is obvious that some patients may not be religious or consider their religious beliefs a personal issue to be dealt with outside of their medical management. Thus, spiritual care interventions must be individualized as a matter of voluntary choice by the patients.⁴ There is a need for controlled clinical trials that use rigorous research design to test well-formulated spiritual interventions on patients' outcome and determine the efficacy of such approaches.

Patients with stronger religious beliefs tend to be more meticulous about their lifestyle changes and adherence to recommended practices.⁵ Although not outwardly mentioned in the Qur'an and

Prophet Muhammad traditions, the lifestyle that the Qur'an encourages, drastically decreases the chances of individuals developing cardiovascular diseases via the following ways: engaging in spiritual activities, moderate eating, physical labor, and abstention from forbidden foods and drinks.⁶ Overeating has been strongly condemned and prohibited in the Qur'an. Though we do not find much in the Qur'an about specific exercise recommendation, the Islamic prayer is performed at least five times a day and consists of a series of movements entailing standing, prostrating and sitting. The lifestyle prescribed by these Islamic traditions promotes longevity of life, prevention of cardiovascular diseases, and discourages risk factors associated with such diseases.⁸

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