

*Mary O'Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009),*

The 2005 Newsweek Poll found that 79% of Americans described themselves as “spiritual.” Almost two thirds of Americans say they pray every day, nearly a third meditate every day and 44% said they attend church every week. Therefore, American’s sense of a personal spirituality and connection to the Devine seems to be thriving.<sup>1</sup>

**Religion** and **spirituality** which is not the same.

**Religion** according to Webster’s New Universal Dictionary is “any specific system of belief, worship, conduct, etc., often involving a code of ethics.”

**Spirituality** is defined as both sensitivity or attachment to religious values,” and “the quality or state of being spiritual. “Spiritual is defined as having to do with “ the spirit,” “sacred values,” “religious matters.” Spirituality is also an inner sense of something greater than oneself. Recognition of a meaning to existence that transcends one’s immediate circumstances.”<sup>2</sup>

According to Dr. Mary O’Brien, M.D. throughout much of history, medicine and religion have been linked. A community’s spiritual leaders - medicine men, shamans, faith healers, priests – were often its caregivers. Sickness was likely attributed to God’s will and therapies were based more on superstition than science. All over the world, the faithful continue to read religious scriptures and appeal to higher forces to help them heal through prayer, pilgrimages to shrines, and other spiritual activities. Illness and suffering lead people to consult both health professionals and clergy members. The two professions often work together in the face of dying and death.<sup>3</sup>

Study done on 393 cardiac patients admitted to the coronary care unit at San Francisco General Hospital: One group of randomized patients were assigned to intercessory prayer group. Another group was a control group without connecting to an intercessory prayer group. Each intercessor was asked to pray for a rapid recovery and for prevention of complications of death. The intercessory prayer was done outside of the hospital daily until the patient was discharged from the hospital. Those in the hospital did not know the intercessors or that they were praying for them.

The result was reported that in the prayer group, 85% were considered to have a good hospital course after admission, versus 73% in the control group. Byrd wrote, “showed the prayer group had less congestive heart failure, required less diuretic and antibiotic therapy, had fewer episodes of pneumonia, had fewer cardiac arrests, and were less frequently intubated and ventilated.” These data, he concluded, “suggest that intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God has a beneficial therapeutic effect in patients admitted to a CCU.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Mary O'Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 2.*

<sup>2</sup> *Mary O'Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 3.*

<sup>3</sup> *Mary O'Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 1.*

<sup>4</sup> *Mary O'Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 4-5.*

Another study on AIDS patients and prayer found out that “Prayer in the form of ‘distant healing’ (DH) had a positive impact on advanced AIDS patients (by outside prayers).”<sup>5</sup>

A study on a depressed patients reported that “It was belief in a higher power, having a relationship with a higher power, and belief in prayer that contributed to patients being less depressed.”<sup>6</sup>

The research found that people who attended worship services regularly were less depressed than those who believed themselves to be spiritual or possess spiritual values but didn’t attend services.<sup>7</sup>

Conclusion: Although controversy persists, the studies are clinically relevant: Cardiac and AIDS patients benefited from intercessory prayer. Medical students under stress and college students traumatized by the events of September 11 found greater meaning in life through spiritual self-awareness. Stroke victims found solace and were able to handle their disabilities better through prayer and a connection with family. The elderly who independently prayed, meditated, or studied spiritual literature were more likely to live longer than those who didn’t. College students who meditated spiritually were able to withstand pain longer than those who simply practiced relaxation technique., People who less likely to be depressed if they believed in a power greater than themselves and perceived that their lives had meaning. .. In cases in which the person has a negative relationship with religion or spirituality, this can potentially make health outcomes worse. According to Dr. Harold Koenig, “Beliefs indicating religious struggle predict worse mental and physical health outcomes after hospital discharge.”<sup>8</sup>

Herbert Benson, MD, proposed that 60-90 percent of all visits to medical offices are for symptoms or illness which are at least partly stress-related. He reported “relaxation response” in repetitive prayer, or other “mindful practices” that show physiological changes including slowing metabolism, breathing, and heart rate, reduction of muscle tension, and lowered blood pressure in some people. This deeply relaxed state can be considered a “counterbalancing mechanism” to the “fight or flight response.” Benson also documented how eliciting the relaxation response regularly may help some people feel more in control of their lives and cope better with stressful situations. It can be helpful in easing anxiety, hostility, depression, insomnia, chronic pain, hypertension, and other conditions. If faith, prayer, meditation and other forms of religious or spiritual coping can ease the stresses of life and help people feel better, even by simply distracting them from distressing symptoms or other problems, this alone is a significant health benefit that should be encouraged. There exists a growing body of evidence linking spirituality, prayer, and meditation with positive health outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Mary O’Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 7.*

<sup>6</sup> *Mary O’Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 8.*

<sup>7</sup> *Mary O’Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 9.*

<sup>8</sup> *Mary O’Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 15.*

<sup>9</sup> *Mary O’Brien, M.D. Institute for Natural Resources, Health Update, Home-Study #2250. SPIRITUALITY AND (Continuing Education for Health Care Professionals, August 2009), 16.*