

Top researchers criticize new meditation and health study

A controversial new government-funded report, which found that meditation does not improve health, is methodologically flawed, incomplete, and should be retracted.

This is the consensus of a growing number of researchers in the U.S. and abroad who have reviewed the report and are critical of its conclusions.

“Meditation Practices for Health: State of the Research” was a health technology assessment report conducted at the University of Alberta and sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the NIH-National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. The report was released earlier this month.

Professor Harald Walach of the University of Northampton and School of Social Sciences and the Samueli Institute for Information Biology in England reviewed the paper before its release and strongly urged the authors to withhold publication. “When I looked carefully into the details of the study, the whole analytical strategy looked rather haphazard and ad hoc,” Walach said.

Robert Schneider, M.D., F.A.C.C., is one of the leading researchers on the health effects of meditation in the nation. Dr. Schneider has been the recipient of more than \$22 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health over the past 20 years for his research on the effects of the Transcendental Meditation technique and natural medicine on cardiovascular disease. He says that relevant findings were excluded from the report, including peer-reviewed studies on the effects of this meditation technique on hypertension, cardiovascular disease, myocardial ischemia, atherosclerosis, changes to physiology, and improvements to mental and physical health.

Dr. Schneider cited two studies published in the *American Journal of Cardiology* in 2005, which demonstrated that individuals with high blood pressure who were randomly assigned to TM groups had a 30% lower risk for mortality than controls. These studies should have been included in the AHRQ report, Dr. Schneider said, but were inexplicably excluded. In addition, 75 published studies were overlooked, even though these were sent to the authors by one of the reviewers.

Dr. Schneider said the AHRQ report incorrectly analyzed studies and incorrectly rated the quality of the studies while applying statistical methods poorly, arbitrarily, and unsystematically. The report also included errors in collecting data from research studies, in recording data from papers, and in classifying studies. Several peer-reviewers pointed out major errors and inadequacies in the report prior to publication. However, these critiques by outside reviewers were largely ignored. (For critiques of the report, see <http://www.mum.edu/inmp/welcome.html>)

Dr. Schneider also cited a study published in the American Medical Association’s journal *Archives of Internal Medicine* in 2006—one year after the AHRQ review ended in 2005—which confirmed that the Transcendental Meditation technique lowers high blood pressure in heart disease patients. The study was conducted at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and was funded by a \$1.2 million grant from the National Institutes of Health.

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