

Prayers don't help heart surgery patients; Some fare worse when prayed for

Many - if not most people - believe that prayer will help you through a medical crisis such as heart bypass surgery. If a large group of people outside yourself, your family, and your friends joined in intercessory prayer, that should be even more helpful, so such reasoning goes.

Researchers have been trying to prove this and even to measure the effect. So far, two studies found that third-party prayers bestow benefits, but two others concluded that there are no benefits. Now, the largest study to date, covering 1,800 people who underwent coronary bypass surgery at six different hospitals, supported the latter research.

Not only that, but patients who knew that others were praying for them fared worse than those who did not receive such spiritual support, or who did but were not aware of it.

Those who conducted the study are quick to say that its results do not challenge the existence of God. Also, it did not try to address such religious questions as the efficacy of one form of prayer over others, whether God answers intercessory prayers, or whether prayers from one religious group work better than prayers from another, according to the Rev. Dean Marek, a chaplain at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Other researchers in the study, who include investigators from Harvard Medical School, Harvard-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Mind/Body Medical Institute, agree. Also involved were teams from medical institutions in Oklahoma City, Washington, D.C., Memphis, and Rochester, Minn.

"The primary goal of the study was limited to evaluating whether intercessory prayer or the knowledge of receiving it would influence recovery after bypass surgery," notes Jeffery Dusek, an instructor in medicine at Harvard Medical School. The evaluation found that third-party prayer has no effect at all on recovery from surgery without complications, and that patients who knew they were receiving prayer fared worse than those who were not prayed for.

Source: Harvard University

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