

Healing and Medicine

PRAYER AND THE MEDICAL WORLD

For thousands of years medical practitioners of healing have recognized a direct link between the human physical body and the spirit. The Hippocratic Writings note, “there is a measure of conscious thought throughout the body.” The Hebrews viewed people as one entity, not body, soul, and spirit separately. They would not consider treating the body without treating the spirit and vice versa. .

In the 1980s, Dr. Larry Dossey discovered Controlled studies showing that prayer has positive effects even when tested under stringent conditions in double-blind studies in hospitals and laboratories. “I was very impressed by this,” wrote Dr. Dossey, “and spent years chasing down every study I could find. One hundred thirty one studies later, I concluded this is one of the best kept secrets in modern medicine.”

Medical researcher Harold Koenig wrote, “High technology medicine is accomplishing much, but its limitations are obvious to many. *It has emphasized the mechanical, physiological, and biochemical means for restoring health and sustaining physical life, but it has tended to minimize or even ignore the psychological, social, and especially the religious and spiritual dimensions of healing.*”

Epidemiologist Jeff Levin, a research fellow at the National Institute for Healthcare Research, after reviewing more than two hundred medical studies dating back to the nineteenth century, concluded that “religious commitment enhances health and that evidence shows prayer plays a therapeutic role in disease.” “In fact,” he added, “a lack of spirituality seems to be a risk factor for higher rates of illness.”

In 1996 “Time” magazine reported that 82 percent of adult Americans believed in the healing power of personal prayer, 73 percent believed praying for someone can help cure their illness, and 64 percent believed doctors should pray with patients if requested. “The Lancet”, a British medical publication reported “Of 296 physicians surveyed during the October, 1996, meeting of the American Academy of family physicians, 99% were convinced that religious beliefs can heal, and 75% believed that prayers of others could promote a patient’s recovery.”

Dr. Randolph Byrd, a Christian cardiologist at San Francisco General Hospital, conducted a randomized, double-blind study involving 393 patients admitted to the coronary care unit. Neither the patients, nurses, not even the doctors knew which group the patients were in. The patients were computer assigned to either a 201-patient control group or to the 192 patients who were prayed for daily by five to seven people in home prayer groups. The study concludes:

1. Those prayed for were five times less likely to require antibiotics.
2. They were three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema, a condition in which the lungs fill with fluid.

3. None of those prayed for required endotracheal intubation, the insertion of an artificial airway in the throat, compared with twelve in the control group who required the treatment.
4. They experienced fewer cases of pneumonia and cardiopulmonary arrests.
5. Fewer patients in the prayed-for group died.

Regarding Dr. Byrd's study, Dr. Dossey responds, "if the technique being studied had been a new drug or a surgical procedure instead of prayer, it would almost certainly have been heralded as some sort of 'breakthrough.'" Dr. William Nolan, who wrote a book debunking faith healing, is quoted as saying, "It sounds like this study will stand up to scrutiny ... maybe we doctors ought to be writing on our order sheets, Pray three times a day. If it works, it works."