

# Survey finds spirituality is important to eye patients

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Patients visiting an ophthalmologist report that prayer is important to their well-being and that God plays a positive role in illness, according to a report in the September issue of *Archives of Ophthalmology*.

"Ethical medical practice includes physician behavior, beyond technical competence, that promotes healing and optimizes the patient's welfare," the authors write as background information in the article. "The physician who respects the patient as a person with dignity must acknowledge the patient's value system to establish a relationship that permits conversations that nourish trust for joint therapeutic decision making. For many patients, religion and spirituality is important to their value system and may represent a unique source of motivation and coping with life events, including the experience of personal illness (illness refers to the response of a patient to a disease)."

Gina Magyar-Russell, Ph.D., of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore, and colleagues distributed a brief questionnaire to 124 patients visiting the office of one ophthalmologist. The 14-question survey was completed by the patient and collected without any identifying information, so patients could be assured the answers would not affect their care.

Of the participants:

-- 76.6 percent were Christian, 5.6 percent Jewish and 3.2 percent agnostic

- 69.4 percent reported that prayer was very important to their sense of well-being and 12.9 percent that it was moderately important
- 45.2 percent attend religious services at least once per week
- 41.1 percent agreed that God permits illness but doesn't cause it, and 54.8 percent believe God can influence a cure
- 58.1 percent report that God can directly help physicians treat illness
- 67.7 percent agree that God helps them be "at peace" with their illness
- Most believe either that illness is a way to make one stronger (32.3 percent) or that it is a mystery (36.3 percent) rather than a punishment from God (4 percent) or a test (22.6 percent)

"Christians were more likely to believe that God can influence cure than were Jewish and agnostic participants, and there was a trend toward Christians believing that God gives strength to be 'at peace' with illness compared with Jewish and agnostic participants," the authors write. "Christians also reported more frequent religious and spiritual service attendance, and they rated prayer as more important than individuals reporting Jewish and agnostic belief systems."

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals

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