

Cardiac risk estimates differ for Christian and Muslim patients

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In a study of medical students, more serious cardiac risk estimates were given to Christians and less serious estimates for Muslims despite the patients being otherwise identical in their characteristics and symptoms, according to research in an upcoming issue of *Medical Decision Making* published by SAGE. Risk assessment, the first step in a medical triage process, determines subsequent treatment.

In the study, led by Jamie Arndt, PhD, of the University of Missouri-Columbia, randomly chosen university medical students were asked to answer questions about their own mortality. Afterward, all the study participants inspected fictitious emergency room admittance forms for Muslim and Christian patients complaining of chest pain, and risk assessments were made for each patient. The participants who had been reminded of their personal mortality rendered more serious cardiac risk estimates for Christians and less serious estimates for Muslims despite the patients being otherwise identical in their characteristics and symptoms.

"We should emphasize that there is no reason to suspect intentional biased judgment on the part of medical students, since research indicates that most prejudicial responses occur without people's intent or awareness," write the authors in the article, noting that none of the study participants identified themselves as Muslim. "Still, psychological motivations provoked by concerns with one's mortality can have far-reaching effects in a health care context. Further research is needed because it is vital that these effects be better understood."

Source: SAGE Publications

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