

Cardiovascular patients' perspectives on guilt as a motivational tool

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Current research supports the notion that lifestyle choices influence cardiovascular health, but to what extent specific emotions play is undefined. Now, new research from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine has revealed the role that guilt may play as a motivational tool for cardiovascular patients.

Penn researchers interviewed 100 adult cardiology outpatients about the role that guilt plays in their adherence to instructions given by their physicians and as part of their views of their own health. The majority of the patients reported that guilt provides motivation to make lifestyle changes; this finding was associated with having children but no other demographics. When asked whether providers should routinely address guilt with their patients, over half of the patients said yes. Patients with a religious affiliation were more likely to answer that health practitioners should routinely address guilt.

Of the entire sample, 66 percent of patients had experienced a major [cardiovascular event](#), such as a heart attack. Just over 20 percent of these patients reported feelings of guilt related to their health. However, half of these patients wished they had taken better care of themselves, but had no feelings of guilt relating to their health. The study results were reported at the 2011 American College of Cardiology meeting in New Orleans.

"When counseling cardiovascular patients about lifestyle, practitioners should consider addressing guilt as both a motivation for, and a barrier

to, lifestyle change, particularly in patients with religious backgrounds," concluded senior author James Kirkpatrick, MD, assistant professor of Medicine, Cardiovascular Medicine Division at Penn. "Further research is needed to explore the impact of guilt motivation on patient outcomes."

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine

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