

How do you mend a broken heart?

November 28 2011

(Medical Xpress) -- A study involving University of Sydney cardiac researchers has shown the loss of a loved one can really break your heart.

Dr Anastasia Susie Mihailidou, from the Sydney Medical School says when we lose someone we love it may feel as if our heart is breaking.

Dr Milhailidou, a clinical senior lecturer at Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH), is part of a multi-disciplinary team led by Professor Geoff Tofler, Professor of Medicine and Dr Tom Buckley, Sydney Nursing School, based on the RNSH campus. The team is involved in a study providing insight into why people grieving the loss of a loved one, such as a spouse or a parent, experience a heightened [blood pressure](#) variability. Increased blood pressure variability has been shown to be predictive for stroke and other [cardiovascular complications](#).

The team - made up of doctors, nurses, scientists and social workers from RNSH, the University of Sydney, University of Technology, Sydney and the Kolling Institute - examined the [heart rate](#) and blood pressure of 63 people who had a spouse or parent die in hospital.

Their blood pressure and heart rate were recorded two weeks after the death and then again at six months.

Dr Anastasia Mihailidou said all of the participants recorded at the two-week mark showed heightened blood pressure variability.

She said the most telling sign was at the six-month mark. Heart rates had

returned to normal but blood pressure was still fluctuating.

These results were compared to a group of 78 participants who saw their sick loved ones return home from hospital. Their heart rates and blood pressure records remained unchanged.

"The results indicate that someone who is grieving and who is already experiencing blood pressure issues would find these problems amplified during or because of [bereavement](#)," Dr Mihailidou said.

"These changes aren't large, but if heightened blood pressure variability goes unnoticed they can cause problems," she said.

The team is now embarking on a second phase of the study. This will involve treating those who are grieving.

Dr Mihailidou hopes this research will encourage people who are busy caring for those who are sick or dying to be aware of their own physical health, as well as their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

The current results of the study were be presented at the recent American [Heart](#) Association Annual Scientific Meeting held in Florida, USA.

Provided by University of Sydney

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