

Study: Doctors think faith helps patients

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A new survey finds that 85 percent of U.S. doctors believe religious faith can help patients have a good outcome.

Researchers polled 1,144 doctors for the study, which was published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, The Los Angeles Times reported. Only 1 percent said they believe religious faith and spirituality have a negative effect, while 2 percent said it has no effect and 12 percent said they think the positive and negative effects are balanced.

Asked about their own religious beliefs, 54 percent said they think God sometimes intervenes to help patients, 28 percent do not and 18 percent are agnostic.

Dr. John Robertson, chief heart surgeon at St. John's Health Center in Santa Monica, Calif., told the newspaper he has observed that patients with a strong religious faith are more optimistic and recover more quickly. Other doctors say churches and other religious organizations can provide emotional and practical support to patients.

Some doctors said the downside of religious belief is that patients can believe their illnesses are divine punishment. Some religions also stigmatize people with AIDS.

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