Exploring the role of spirituality in emotional symptoms experienced by cardiac transplant patients.

Joely Zilkha, Melissa Owen PhD, RN, CCTC
Emory University Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing, Atlanta, GA

Background & Definitions

Background:
- Heart failure is the primary indication for cardiac transplant.
- Waiting on the transplant list for an extended period of time has adverse effects on both the physical and emotional health of heart failure patients.
- Further emotional support could be provided to heart failure patients through spirituality.

Definitions:
- Emotional symptoms are defined as anxiety, depression, hopelessness, uncertainty, and/or inability to cope related to their illness.
- Spirituality is defined as the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning purpose, and transcendence, and the way they experience connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to family, to society, to nature and/or to the significant or sacred.

Methods

- This study was a retrospective secondary analysis of data.
- The 14 patients interviewed were recruited via blogs and internet support groups for heart failure and cardiac transplant patients.
- Interview questions were chosen to specifically focus on exploring emotional symptoms experienced, and conversations about spirituality:
  1. What types of emotional symptoms did/do you experience while awaiting transplant?
  2. What symptoms have bothered you most during this experience?
  3. Can you tell me what gives/gave your life meaning while awaiting transplant?
  4. What does spirituality mean to you?
  5. How did/does your own spirituality impact you while awaiting transplant?
- Demographics: n=14

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Where the participant waited for transplant
- Home | 7  | 50 |
- Hospital | 7  | 50 |

When the participant received the transplant
- Currently waiting for transplant | 2  | 14.3 |
- Already received a transplant | 12 | 85.7 |

Findings

- Three themes emerged from analyzing responses from fourteen participants.
- Themes and Descriptive Quotes:
  1. Desire to maintain normalcy.
     - “[Returning to work] keeps me – my mind off of things. Makes me feel normal, makes me feel like I have a purpose.”
  2. Sharing success stories.
     - “By seeing that it was them, you’re happy for them and then it reminds you that the organs do come. You just gotta [sic] stay strong and eventually one will be there for you.”
  3. Spirituality is independent from religion.
     - “They had a couple of chaplains [in the hospital] and some of my best conversations were with chaplains. Not in a religious context, but just more of a holistic context. I could talk to someone who was part of the process but not part of the critical medical part of it…”

Discussion & Conclusions

- Thematic analysis from this study revealed that when cardiac transplant candidates used spirituality to find meaning in their lives and facilitate connectedness to others, themselves, and the moment, they felt a sense of relief from their emotional symptoms.
- Results from this study can guide implementation of spirituality based interventions into clinical practice, as well as further research to assess the impact of spiritual interventions on patients’ emotional symptom burden.
- Potential limitations are related to decreased ability of participants to recall their transplant experience and lack of diversity in the participants interviewed.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of spirituality relating to emotional symptoms experienced in heart failure patients awaiting cardiac transplant.