

Prayer and Self-Reported Health among Cancer Survivors in the United States, National Health Interview Survey, 2002

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Objectives: At least 10.8 million living Americans have been diagnosed with cancer, and about 1.5 million new cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed in 2008. The purpose of this study was to examine prayer for health and self-reported health among a sample of men and women with a personal history of cancer.

Methods: We used data from the 2002 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) which collected information on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practices.

Results: Among 2,262 men and women with a history of cancer, 68.5% reported having prayed for their own health and 72% reported good or better health status. Among cancer survivors, praying for one's own health was associated with several sociodemographic variables including being female, non-Hispanic black, and married. Compared to persons with a history of skin cancer, persons with a history of breast cancer, colorectal cancer, a cancer with a short survival period (e.g., pancreatic cancer), or other cancers were more likely to pray for their health. Persons who reported good or better health were more likely to be female, younger, have higher levels of education and income, and have no history of additional chronic disease. Overall, praying for one's own health was inversely associated with good or better health status.

Conclusions: Data from this nationally representative sample indicate that prayer for health is commonly used among people with a history of cancer and that use of prayer varies by cancer site. The findings should add to the current body of literature that debates issues around spirituality, decision-making about treatment, and physician care.