



57th Annual Scientific Session
MARCH 29 – APRIL 1 • CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Saturday, March 29, 2008
11:00 a.m. CDT

CONTACT: Andrew Crosby
(901) 575-0010
acrosby@crosbyvolmer.com
Amy Murphy
(202) 375-6476
amurphy@acc.org
ACC.08 Newsroom:
(312) 949-3450

**LOWERING OR KEEPING ANXIETY LEVELS IN CHECK DRAMATICALLY
REDUCES HEART ATTACK OR DEATH IN PATIENTS WITH HEART DISEASE**

Those who can calm down can also live longer, healthier lives

CHICAGO, IL – Anxiety is a normal reaction to life’s stressors; however, if left unchecked, such angst can spell trouble for patients with coronary artery disease—a leading type of heart disease. By taking steps to lower anxiety levels over time, these patients can significantly decrease their risk of heart attack and even death, according to new data presented today at the American College of Cardiology’s 57th Annual Scientific Session.

“Psychological stress, be it depression or anxiety, has been linked to the progression of atherosclerosis, development of atherothrombosis and increased risk of arrhythmias,” said Yinong Young-Xu, Ph.D., of the Lown Cardiovascular Research Foundation, and lead investigator of this study. “Very few studies, however, have tried to examine whether we can improve cardiovascular outcomes if we assess patients’ mental health and work to reduce levels of depression or anxiety through the use of medications, good patient-doctor relationships and/or psychotherapy.”

This is the first observational study to examine the impact of treating anxiety on cardiovascular outcomes, according to Dr. Young-Xu. Of the 516 patients with coronary artery disease enrolled in this prospective cohort study, 44 experienced nonfatal heart attacks and 19 deaths during an average follow up of 3.4 years. Patients who reduced or kept their anxiety level steady were up to 60 percent less likely to have a heart attack or die compared to those who had an increase in anxiety level. This association remained after adjusting for other potential cardiovascular risk

- more -

factors including age, sex, education, marital status, smoking, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, previous MI, body mass index, total cholesterol, blood pressure, heart rate, ejection fraction and exercise treadmill test duration.

“These findings should reinforce to cardiologists a need to attend to the whole patient by paying attention to psychological problems in addition to cardiovascular disease,” said Dr. Young-Xu, adding that the lifetime prevalence of anxiety disorder is around 30 percent among people with heart disease. “If we can lower heart patients’ anxiety level, we may be able to reduce their risk of heart attack and prolong their life.”

Patients were divided into three groups according to their baseline level of anxiety – high, intermediate and low. At follow up, declining, steady or increasing states of anxiety were noted. Researchers used the Kellner Symptom Questionnaire to measure patients’ anxiety level at baseline and then annually, either during a scheduled clinic visit or by mail. This self-administered questionnaire asks subjects to answer 92 “yes/no” questions about their feelings during the previous week (for example, whether they felt "peaceful," "nervous" or "terrified," whether it “takes a long time to fall asleep,” and if they experience “upset bowels or stomach” and other physical signs of stress). In addition to anxiety, the questionnaire measures depression, hostility and somatization.

While these data show a strong association between anxiety levels and cardiovascular health, Dr. Young-Xu and his team eagerly anticipate the results of randomized controlled trials that further examine and establish the role of anxiety in the cardiovascular prognosis of these patients. The present study is a follow up to research published in last year’s *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* that showed highly anxious patients with heart disease face nearly double the risk of heart attack or death when compared to those with a more serene outlook on life.

Chronic anxiety can result in increased sympathetic outflow, reduced heart rate variability and baroreflex reactivity as well as impaired vagal control that have been linked to increased cardiac mortality from ventricular arrhythmia and sudden cardiac death. Chronically elevated catecholamine levels (associated with high anxiety level) have been demonstrated to increase lipoprotein lipase levels, blood sugar, and blood pressure and clumping together of platelets, which may promote clotting.

Dr. Young-Xu will present “Declining Anxiety Level Improves Prognosis in Patients With Coronary Artery Disease” on Tuesday, April 1, at 10:00 a.m. in 360 Education Theatre South Hall in McCormick Place.

###

The American College of Cardiology (www.acc.org) represents the majority of board certified cardiovascular physicians in the United States. Its mission is to advocate for quality cardiovascular care through education, research, promotion, development and application of standards and guidelines- and to influence health care policy. ACC.08 is the largest cardiovascular meeting, bringing together cardiologists and cardiovascular specialists to share

the newest discoveries in treatment and prevention, while helping the ACC achieve its mission to address and improve issues in cardiovascular medicine.