

## **Exceptional Heart Patients Do Not Always Obey Doctor's Orders**

By Bruno Cortis, M.D.

### **Three Categories of Heart Patients**

As a cardiologist, I categorize patients into three types. First are patients who come to my office carrying an imaginary bag loaded with all medical problems suffered in their life - and they tell me to "fix" them. Second are obedient consumers who obey my medical advice - but take no initiative in their treatment; they usually have average outcomes.

The third category of patients are the most inspiring. I classify them as exceptional heart patients. These individuals focus on how healthy they are, not how sick they are. They concentrate on living life rather than prolonging life. They see their heart disease as a challenge, an opportunity to broaden their knowledge and awareness. While they might well have realistic fears for the future, they make a conscious choice to:

- Respond to their situation in a proactive way
- Take full responsibility

They look deeply into their heart and find the courage and perseverance to make the necessary changes to bring their lives into balance.

Exceptional heart patients do not always obey doctor's orders. In fact, they often cause their doctors a good deal of trouble by questioning their advice, refusing to go along with their prescribed treatment, or seeking second opinions. They demand a great deal of information about their condition. They want their doctors to serve as advisors and consultants, not as authorities. They insist on making the final decisions themselves. Many employ some form of diet, exercise, meditation, spiritual involvement, and the power of love.

### **Mildred, An Exceptional Heart Patient**

I am reminded of the experience of Mildred, a young woman who had developed bone cancer at the age 12 which resulted in her having one leg amputated. As a child she underwent radiation and chemotherapy. To further complicate her condition, she developed a heart problem that demanded a heart transplant at the age 18.

These experiences would have destroyed almost anybody. Still, when I interviewed the patient over the phone, I heard a wonderful voice, full of life and enthusiasm. Not only did she recover and even get married, she also was working and raising a family. When I asked how she said, "I never give up." This is an exceptional heart patient.

### **The Case of Myron**

Myron is another exceptional heart patient. He is 81 years old, tall, bald, and has blue eyes and a gentle smile. He speaks softly. Myron had a large abdominal aortic aneurysm, a dilatation of the aorta. When I went to see him, he was lying down peacefully with his wife seated near the bed. She was holding her purse and her expression was that of tiredness. Although I explained the seriousness of the situation, his face remained calm and steady. He and his wife both told me: If it will happen, it will happen - but no surgery. What

amazes me is that they both understood it was a life-threatening illness. But they didn't fear death. They preferred to take their lives in their hands and accept all responsibility.

I saw Myron again in ICU the following morning; his vital signs were stable. His lack of fear and peaceful acceptance of his natural destiny delayed his reuniting with God for several years.

### **Exceptional Heart Patients**

Exceptional heart patients have much to teach us about caring for our heart. They are open to the spiritual dimensions of their heart. They face fears and challenges of life and death head-on. They do not just live their lives - they actually design their lives. They do not rely only on physicians to save them.

Exceptional heart patients take self-responsibility to unimagined extremes. They ooze optimism that they will live another day - plus enjoy themselves along the way. Despite their health problems, their spirit ignites an inner flame that makes living life fully their only option.