



THE INSTITUTE FOR
FUNCTIONAL
MEDICINE®

Dr. Mimi Guarneri is a faculty presenter at this year's **Annual International Conference: A New Era in Preventing, Managing, and Reversing Cardiovascular and Metabolic Dysfunction**. Dr. Guarneri will be speaking on:

- Healing the Heart: Creating a Heart-centered Therapeutic Relationship
- Strength in the Storm: Enhancing Resiliency to Impact the Effect of Stress
- Transforming Stress: Mindfulness Experience
- The Healing Path: Integrative Mind-Body Cardiology
- Complicated Cases and Clinical Pearls with the Experts (with Dr. Mark Hyman)

Dr. Guarneri is also the author the excellent book, *“The Heart Speaks: A Cardiologist Reveals the Secret Language of Healing”*. What follows are notes from that book...

NOTES FROM *THE HEART SPEAKS*

There are many aspects of the heart:

- The mental heart: affected by hostility, stress and depression.
- The emotional heart: affected by loss
- The intelligent heart that has a nervous system of its own and communicates with the brain and other parts of the body.
- The spiritual heart that yearns for a higher purpose
- The universal heart that communicates with others

As many as half of coronary disease cases cannot be linked to the usual suspects: traditional risk factors of family history, smoking, high blood pressure, obesity, and inactivity. **There are many more factors creating susceptibility or resistance to heart disease and heart attacks than high cholesterol:**

1. A Sense of Community

From 1935 to 1984, Dr. Stewart Wolf conducted a study of people in Roseto, PA to investigate their lack of heart disease. Despite the community's fatty diet, high smoking levels, and hazardous labor in slate quarries, they seemed to be resistant to heart disease, with rates less than half that of the rest of the country. The community was very close-knit, with family and neighbors watching over each other and celebrating religious festivals and family occasions together. These characteristics of a tight-knit community turned out to be better predictors of

healthy hearts than cholesterol and smoking. These results have been validated by studies in several different countries (observing thousands of participants for 5 to 9 years) showing that socially isolated participants demonstrated a 2-to-3 fold increased risk of death from heart disease and all other causes compared with participants who felt most connected with others. These results were independent of other cardiac risk factors.

2. Stress

According to the Framingham study, 80% of people who had a heart attack had the same cholesterol levels as those who did not. In addition, most heart attacks occur when a blockage is less than 50%. At this percentage, patients may have no symptoms at all and may even pass an exercise stress test, which may only pick up blockages greater than 70%. It is not uncommon to hear that someone had a stress test one week and died of a heart attack the next. It isn't until there is a blockage of 70% that a person displays the common symptoms of a heart attack.

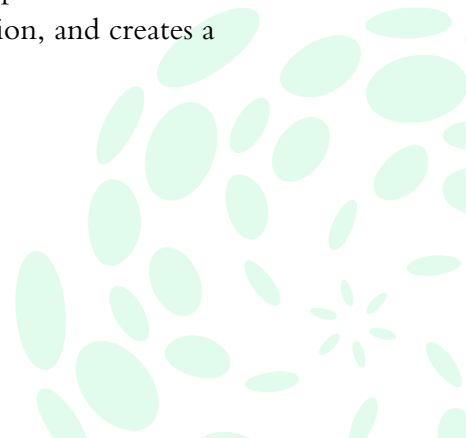
Stress is comparable in power to hypertension as a risk factor for cardiac disease. Adrenaline, the major hormone associated with the stress response, raises blood pressure, increases heart rate, narrows blood vessels, makes platelets stickier, and raises cholesterol—all of which increase the risk of a cardiac event. Between 75% and 90% of all visits to healthcare practitioners are due to stress related disorders. The Mayo Clinic has concluded that psychological stress is the strongest indicator of future cardiac events.

3. Echoes of Anger

We now know that diseases of the heart can be caused by other, more subtle factors—such as isolation, depression, and hostility—that have to do with not only how we live but how we experience our lives. There are recent studies suggesting that hostility may be a better predictor of heart disease than more traditional risk factors like cholesterol and smoking. The only risk factor that predicted heart disease risk more accurately than hostility was low levels of HDL.

4. The Landscape of Depression

Depression ranks behind high blood pressure and high cholesterol as a major risk factor for coronary artery disease. Those with heart disease who are depressed have a 4 times higher risk of death after a heart attack compared with those who are not depressed. At the University of Washington, an ongoing study found that factors such as depression, anxiety, a sense of self-efficacy, and the quality of spousal support were better predictors of a patient's degree of physical impairment than the severity of coronary artery disease, even when the arteries were blocked as much as 70%. Research now shows that having a grateful attitude allows people to better deal with stress, causing them to be more optimistic, which boosts immune function, and creates a better health and well-being.



5. Sacred Revelations

A double-blind study of 150 cardiac patients was done at Duke University to test the idea that spiritual influence could have a measurable impact. One arm of the study group contained patients who were prayed for by spiritual leaders around the world. Neither the doctors nor the patients knew of the prayer group. The patients who were prayed for had fewer adverse effects than those who were not. The health benefits of religious belief include lower blood pressure, lower heart rate, decreased anxiety, and enhanced sense of well-being

6. The Persistence of Grief

The elevated risk of a heart attack in the first 24 hours after the loss of a loved one is 14 times higher than normal. Men who complain of high anxiety are up to 6 times more likely to suffer sudden cardiac death. Heart attack survivors who try to remain calm during emotional conflict have half the risk of heart attacks compared with those who tend to get angry.



Biography

Dr. Mimi Guarneri is founder and medical director of Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine in La Jolla, CA, and has been an attending physician in cardiovascular disease at Scripps Clinic since 1995. Dr. Guarneri is the author of numerous articles that have appeared in such journals as the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and the *Journal of Echocardiology*. She has been honored by the American Heart Association, and won the 2011 Bravewell Leadership Award for her “significant contribution to the transformation of the U.S. health care system through the use of integrative medicine.” She is board certified in cardiology and internal medicine.

