

**Public release date: 3-Apr-2006**

Contact: Gloria Kreps

<mailto:KrepsGA@upmc.edu>

412-647-3555

Jane Duffield

[DuffieldDJ@upmc.edu](mailto:DuffieldDJ@upmc.edu)

412-647-3555

[University of Pittsburgh Medical Center](#)

### **Weekly religious attendance nearly as effective as statins and exercise in extending life**

PITTSBURGH – In a study comparing the associations between faith and health, a University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) physician has shown the improvements in life expectancy of those who attend religious services on a weekly basis to be comparable to those who participate in regular physical exercise and to those who take statin-type medications. These findings are published in the March-April issue of the Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine.

The study uses life expectancy tables to compare the impact of regular exercise, statin therapy and religious attendance, and shows that each accounts for an additional two-to-five years of life, suggesting that the real-world, practical significance of weekly religious attendance is of similar magnitude to this other widely recommended therapy or health behavior.

"This is not to say that religious attendance should replace primary prevention such as exercise, or a proven drug therapy, such as statin therapy, but it does suggest that regular religious attendance is associated with a substantially longer life expectancy, and this warrants further research," cautions study author Daniel Hall, M.D., who is a resident in general surgery at UPMC and an Episcopal priest.

The goal, according to Dr. Hall, was to compare and quantify the extra years of life associated with regular religious attendance to activities known to extend life – a primary prevention activity known to have health benefits (exercise) and a proven therapeutic regimen (statin therapy).

Hall's analysis shows regular physical exercise to be the most effective, accounting for 3.0-to-5.1 years of additional life over a lifetime. Although not as effective as regular exercise, both statins and religious attendance also accounted for longer life expectancy, with statins accounting for 2.1-to-3.7 additional years of life and regular religious attendance accounting for 1.8-to-3.1 additional years of life.

A secondary cost analysis suggests that religious attendance may actually be more cost effective than statins. The lifetime monetary cost of each therapy or behavior was calculated using insurance data for the average yearly cost of statins, census data for the average annual household contribution to religious institutions, and the cost of a modest gym membership for exercise,. This lifetime cost was then divided by the additional years of life attributable to each behavior. Each year of life gained from statin therapy cost about \$10,000 while religious attendance cost \$7,000 per year of life gained. Physical exercise was the most cost effective at approximately \$4,000 per year of life gained.

"Religious attendance is not a mode of medical therapy. While this study was not intended for use in clinical decision making, these findings tell us that there is something to examine further," said Dr. Hall. "The significance of this finding may prove to be controversial, but at the very least, it shows that further research into the associations between religion and health might have implications for medical practice."

"Unlike other health behaviors, such as exercise, there are practical and ethical problems with recommending "therapeutic" changes in religious behavior, and there is no evidence that changing religious attendance causes a change in health outcomes. However, these findings contribute to the growing body of scientific literature examining the associations between religious attendance and health," he said.

###

Dr. Hall, currently a fourth year surgical resident at UPMC, completed a three-year fellowship in religion and medicine at Duke University Medical Center in July 2005. He attended Yale University and Yale Divinity School and earned his medical degree from the Yale School of Medicine in 1999. He was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 2001.