



St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center

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NEWS RELEASE

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St. Joseph's Heart Doctor Says 'Broken Heart' Syndrome is Real, Potentially Deadly

A leading cardiac surgeon at St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center confirms what countless love songs and poems have concluded: Yes, you really can die of a broken heart.

Dr. Lishan Aklog, Chief of Cardiovascular Surgery at the Heart & Lung Institute at St. Joseph's, says recent research has shown that the flood of hormones that are released during a stressful event, such as a romantic breakup, can stun the heart, causing sudden, life-threatening heart spasms in otherwise healthy people. The little-known condition is called Acute Stress Cardiomyopathy or Takotsubo Syndrome.

While most people – and even many doctors – are unfamiliar with this medical condition, a recent poll conducted by St. Joseph's did, in fact, show that **60 percent of Valley residents believe it is possible to die of a broken heart.**

"There is a lot of evidence of the relationship between psychological stress and heart disease, especially heart attacks," says Dr. Aklog. "However, Acute Stress Cardiomyopathy is a fascinating syndrome that is far less understood and only recently getting attention. It mimics a heart attack, but the coronary arteries are usually clean and the heart dysfunction is actually caused by the sudden release of hormones."

Dr. Aklog says the condition is often seen in older women, but no one knows exactly how frequently it occurs because many patients are misdiagnosed with a massive heart attack. "In fact, they have not had a heart attack, but have suffered from a surge of adrenalin and other stress hormones that temporarily shock the heart."

The little-known phenomenon is serious, says Dr. Aklog, and it can put victims at risk for potentially severe complications and even death. But, he says, while victims of classic heart attacks often experience long-term damage and require months to recover, these patients can show dramatic improvement in a few days and completely recover in a few weeks.

— St. Joseph's —