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#### **Facing the diagnosis of myocardial infarction: a qualitative study of Croatian patient experience**

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**Background & Aim:** Patient experience is increasingly recognized as one of the three pillars of quality in healthcare, alongside clinical effectiveness and patient safety. However, little attention has been paid to the patients' experience from the point of health care delivery view. Exploring patients experiences within a „natural“ context is recommended methodology for the identification of factors and strategies that help patients make adjustment to chronic illness. The Aim of this study was to explore the initial experience of patients facing a new diagnosis of myocardial infarction (MI).

**Method:** 30 semi-structured, individual interviews with MI patients were performed. The Grounded Theory method was used. Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software facilitated the analysis.

**Results:** Three patterns of MI diagnosis experience were found: a close encounter with death, severe pain, and 'silent' MI. Newly diagnosed MI patients who experienced an encounter with death expected a purely biomedical approach, limited to life-saving measures, followed by the opportunity to be left alone to enjoy being alive. By contrast, patients who did not experience a life-threatening situation expected, in addition to medical care, immediate emotional support and the opportunity for their ideas, thoughts, concerns and fears to be heard, explored, and discussed. Six factors facilitated patients coping with a new diagnosis of MI: stay in hospital, completion of diagnostic tests, trust in physicians, the patient's previous expectation that he/she could have a heart attack, the patient's personality, and the need for solitude.

**Conclusions:** Physicians should be aware that different patterns of patient experience when facing MI could indicate patients' differing needs for immediate emotional support and communication. Since each patient's experience is unique and deeply embedded in the cultural context of his or her life, future research on this topic in different population groups and in different settings is needed.