Men's Health In Crisis

**Men’s Health: A silent crisis in America***By Mark Pettus, MD*

Silence is the leading cause of a seriously overlooked health crisis in America – men are living sicker and dying younger than women at a rising rate.

A century ago, women lived, on average, one year longer than men. Today, men, on average, die almost five years earlier than women, according to the Centers for Disease Control.  Men are dying at significantly higher rate than women from the top 10 causes of death.

Most troubling – but also a reason to believe a solution is within reach – is that this crisis in men’s health has very little to do with physiology.  It has to do with men’s tendency to not seek care for their health issues.  Men are 100% less likely than women to visit the doctor for annual examinations and preventive services. Compared to similarly-aged women, men are less likely to have a regular doctor and health insurance and are more likely to put off routine checkups or delay seeing a health provider after experiencing symptoms.

Organizations like the Men’s Health Network are reaching out to men and health providers nationally.  June is Men’s Health Month, a reminder to men to talk to their healthcare providers and learn about important examinations and screenings that assist with finding conditions before they get worse.  The aim is to increase awareness and wellness activities for boys and men, resulting in better health and longer life expectancy.

Here are a few issues which, if actively addressed by men with their health providers, would loudly confront this silent crisis.

**General Health.** Most of the issues affecting men are not gender-specific.  The same cardiometabolic risk factors that lead to heart disease, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, abnormal blood lipids and other conditions are just as prevalent in men as in women. If more men sought diagnosis and treatment for those risks, their chances of controlling or eliminating those conditions would increase dramatically.

**Prostate Health:** The prostate gland is prone to three main conditions: inflammation that can cause burning or painful urination, the urgent need to urinate, trouble urinating and other symptoms; benign enlargement that can compress the urethra and slow or stop the flow of urine, a condition that affects about three quarters of men over 60; and prostate cancer, affecting about one in 7 men during their lifetime.  A scientific debate is under way regarding the frequency of screening tests for prostate cancer. The current recommendation is that men should discuss the pros and cons of PSA screening with their physicians as some men without prostate cancer will screen positive.

**Erectile Dysfunction:**  While men today commonly treat the symptoms of ED by taking a convenient pill, they often overlook the root causes of dysfunction. Conditions like heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, impaired sleep and ongoing stress are impacting blood flow to extremities.  In many cases, some basic diet and lifestyle changes that improve health and quality of life can help ease ED symptoms and improve sexual performance without having to rely on a medication.

**Low Testosterone:** In addition to sperm production, testosterone levels can affect a man’s sex drive, erections, mood, muscle mass and bone density. Once men reach age 30, natural testosterone production begins decreasing at a rate of about 1% per year. So it can be difficult to recognize a difference until the symptoms are a problem: decreased libido, energy, strength, endurance, athletic ability, work performance and general enjoyment of life, and increased sadness or irritability and sleepiness after dinner. When Improving diet by eliminating sugar and ‘junk carbs” and introducing healthier fat sources in one’s diet can dramatically raise testosterone levels. When needed, a doctor can prescribe testosterone replacement therapy to boost it back to effective levels.

When it comes to health, the main message for men is speak up. Talk to your doctor. Don’t let your silence, pride and fears threaten your quality of life.

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