

Doctors ignoring impotence as heart risk: Expert

Doctors too often view erectile dysfunction as a "lifestyle" issue rather than as a serious problem that provides an early warning of a heart attack, a British expert said.

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LONDON - Doctors too often view erectile dysfunction as a "lifestyle" issue rather than as a serious problem that provides an early warning of a heart attack, a British expert said.

This is happening despite considerable evidence that the condition doubles the risk of heart disease, said Geoffrey Hackett, a urologist, at the Good Hope Hospital in Birmingham.

Men with erectile dysfunction carry a 50 per cent higher risk of heart problems, a level comparable to moderate smoking, but doctors do not look out for the problem in people at risk, he added.

"Despite this evidence we don't even screen for erectile dysfunction or low testosterone in type 2 diabetes or patients with coronary heart disease," he wrote in the British Medical Journal.

"We prescribe drugs for coronary heart disease that make erectile dysfunction worse, even though there are drug treatments as effective which improve it, and then make the patients pay privately because we treat erectile dysfunction as a recreational or "lifestyle" issue."

Impotence is a common condition worldwide, and a variety of drugs help the problem by increasing blood flow to the genitals.

Hackett added it is critical to look out for the problem because the condition is the manifestation of vascular disease in smaller arteries and gives a two to three year early warning of a heart attack.

"Continuing to ignore these issues on the basis that cardiologists feel uncomfortable mentioning the word erection to their patients is no longer acceptable and probably clinically negligent," he wrote.

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