

Depression lingers for female heart attack victims

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Women who have suffered heart attacks have higher rates of lingering depressive symptoms compared to their male counterparts, a University of Alberta and McGill University study shows.

In surveying 486 patients, 102 of them female, the joint study found that 14.3 per cent of the women had worsening depression one year after their initial myocardial infarctions, as compared to 11 per cent of the men. As well, the women scored lower than their male counterparts in physical and social functioning after one year (52.97 compared to 74.82, and 77.9 to 67.42 respectively).

“We confirmed that depression definitely played a role in the quality of life of recovering patients, confirming earlier studies we’ve done,” said Colleen Norris, lead author and an associate professor in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada.

Results of the study were published recently in the European Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing.

“The findings are of concern because depression impedes recovery and ultimately, the quality of life in patients following a heart event,” Norris said.

The researchers suggest that women may either have a different response to the treatment for myocardial infarction, or they interpret the experience differently. Past research shows that women use different

coping strategies than men. As well, Norris noted, there is evidence that women are less likely to be referred to or to attend cardiac rehabilitation and therefore they do not have access to the support and assistance in making the lifestyle changes that are necessary for recovery after a heart attack.

The findings confirm a longstanding view that physicians should be screening for depression when patients are undergoing treatment for heart events, and it also alerts medical professionals to the fact that depression is more common in women than men, and must be addressed, Norris said. The study recommends that patients be screened for depression as part of a general health assessment when they are admitted to hospital for heart-related events.

Source: University of Alberta

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