

Erectile dysfunction gives early warning of a heart attack, warns expert

October 22 2008

Erectile dysfunction gives a two to three year early warning of a heart attack, warns an expert on bmj.com today.

But the link between erectile dysfunction and the risk of heart disease is being ignored by doctors, writes Dr Geoffrey Hackett from the Good Hope Hospital in Birmingham.

Over many years Hackett reports regularly seeing patients referred with erectile dysfunction after a heart attack, only to hear that they had developed erectile dysfunction two to three years before—a warning sign ignored by their general practitioners.

It is well known that erectile dysfunction (a symptom of vascular disease in the smaller arteries) doubles the risk of heart disease, a risk equivalent to being a moderate smoker or having an immediate family history of heart disease. Erectile dysfunction in type 2 diabetes has been shown to be a better predictor of the risk of heart disease than high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

But despite this considerable evidence erectile dysfunction is still treated as a recreational or "lifestyle issue" rather than a predictor of a serious health problem, says Hackett.

The UK government has pledged to reduce the death rate from coronary heart disease and stroke and related diseases in people under 75 by at least 40% by 2010, yet there is no screening for erectile dysfunction in

patients with diabetes or heart disease, he says.

"Continuing to ignore these issues on the basis that cardiologists feel uncomfortable mentioning the word 'erection' to their patients or that they may have to deal with the management of a positive response, is no longer acceptable and possibly, based on current evidence, clinically negligent", he concludes.

Source: British Medical Journal

Citation: Erectile dysfunction gives early warning of a heart attack, warns expert (2008, October 22) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-10-erectile-dysfunction-early-heart-expert.html>

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