

More STDs for Older Widowers in ED Drug Era

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Widowers take care: Older men who have recently lost their wives are more likely than still-married peers to be diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease (STD), according to a new study.

Not only that, erectile dysfunction (ED) drugs might up the risk as men respond to ads promising a new lease on lust.

Harvard researchers Kirsten Smith, Ph.D., and Nicholas Christakis, M.D., looked at a random sample of more than 400,000 U.S. couples in which both members were between 67 and 99 years old when the study began in 1993.

Nine years later, 21 percent of men and 43 percent of women had lost their spouses. Of those, a small proportion had been diagnosed with an STD. Men had a 16 percent higher risk of being infected during the six months to a year after their wives died. Women, however, were not at significantly higher risk after losing their husbands.

The likelihood of receiving an STD diagnosis rose by 83 percent for recently bereaved men from 1998 onward, when oral Viagra (sildenafil) hit the U.S market.

So what does this mean for the newly widowed?

“First, the percentage of older adults who were diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection during the multiple years of follow-up was very

low — less than 1 percent for both sexes,” Smith wrote in an e-mail.

“Nonetheless,” Smith added, “older adults need to be aware that they are at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection if they take on a new [sexual partner](#) following a spouse’s death. For men ages 67 and older, the age group that we studied, the use of medications for erectile dysfunction may contribute to that risk by making sex possible. That said, the lesson applies to all older people with new partners.”

The study in the November issue of the [American Journal of Public Health](#) found that gonorrhea was the most common STD in men, while trichomoniasis was most common in women. Other STDs included syphilis, [genital herpes](#), HIV and [human papilloma virus](#) (HPV). Rebecca Hamm, spokesperson for Pfizer, the maker of Viagra, said, “Pfizer encourages all men with ED to see their doctor for a proper diagnosis and to discuss symptoms, treatment options and safe sexual practices. It is clearly stated in the Viagra product label, all product patient communications and television advertising that Viagra does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.”

More information: Smith KP, Christakis MA. Association between widowhood and risk of diagnosis with a sexually transmitted disease in older adults. Am J Public Health 99(11), 2009.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service ([news](#) : [web](#))

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