Higher emergency admissions for depressed older men

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(Medical Xpress)—Depressed older men are twice as likely as those not suffering depression to be admitted to hospital, according to a study published today in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

Winthrop Professor Osvaldo Almeida, Director of The University of Western Australia's Centre for Health and Ageing, said older men suffering from depression were at higher risk of hospitalisation for non-psychiatric conditions.

They were also more likely to have prolonged hospitalisations - up to twice as long - and worse hospital outcomes, compared with non-depressed adults.

Professor Almeida, the study's senior investigator, said the findings highlighted the need for the introduction of strategies that identify and manage older people with depression to prevent hospital admissions and reduce the burden of health-care costs in Australia.

The study looked at 5411 Perth men aged 69 years and older. The men's depressive symptoms were assessed using the 15-item Geriatric Depression Scale. Of the participants, 6.3 per cent had moderate to severe depression. Almost half of the depressed men had at least one emergency admission compared with 23 per cent of non-depressed men. Overnight admissions and deaths in hospital were also higher in this group.

"Possible reasons for the higher admission rates in this depressed group include decreased compliance with treatment plans for other chronic diseases, such as diabetes or hypertension, and physiological changes associated with depression that complicate the course of other medical conditions, such as coronary heart disease," Professor Almeida said.

The research is part of the Health In Men Study (HIMS) following a group of men living in Perth since 1996. It is the largest study of ageing men in Australia.

Depression is a leading cause of disability and health-related costs in Australia and worldwide, and affects between four and 14 per cent of the population at any point in time.

"Although the idea that there is a relationship between depression and medical admission is not new, no previous studies had shown this link in a community, rather than a clinical, sample of older people," Professor Almeida said. "Our results indicate that we must tackle the issue of depression in later life if we are serious about optimising the use of limited hospital resources available to the Australian population."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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