

24,000 female patients missing out on vital cardiac rehabilitation services

16 December 2015, by Saskia Angenent

New research conducted by the University of York and the British Heart Foundation (BHF) indicates that more than 24,000 female heart patients are missing out on crucial rehabilitation, putting them at risk of further heart attacks.

The report, published by the National Audit of Cardiac Rehabilitation (NACR), funded by the BHF and hosted at the University of York, combines data from 164 centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Analysis shows that 38 per cent of [female patients](#) who have a [heart attack](#), angioplasty or bypass surgery receive any [cardiac rehabilitation](#).

Out of 38,500 eligible female patients, just over 14,000 took part in cardiac rehabilitation in England in 2013/14, indicating that services are overlooking female [heart patients](#). Research reveals that a further 5,500 women could take part if services fixed the current gender imbalance and matched male uptake levels (52 per cent).

In England, around 122,000 patients are eligible for cardiac rehabilitation but 47 per cent receive it, despite a government target of 65 per cent.

In some parts of the country, the report shows that patients had to wait seven weeks to start rehabilitation following a heart attack, nearly double the recommendation of starting within 28 days.

When someone suffers a major heart event, such as a heart attack, and needs life-saving surgery or medicine-based treatment, they should then be referred for rehabilitation to help their recovery and reduce the risk of another heart attack.

But at some rehabilitation centres, the report revealed that as few as ten per cent of patients are women, partly because services are failing to refer and encourage female patients to take part. There

are also concerns that older women and men are not attending cardiac rehabilitation following a medically managed heart attack.

Cardiac rehabilitation offers physical activity support and lifestyle advice, such as exercise classes and dietary guidance, to help people living with heart disease manage their condition and reduce their risk of associated heart events.

Rehabilitation is known to reduce the number of deaths by 18 per cent over the first six to 12 months and can cut readmissions by a third (31 per cent).

Professor Patrick Doherty, Director of the NACR project at the University of York's Department of Health Sciences, said: "This report shows that while some programmes promote an attractive rehabilitation service and have a high uptake of female patients, the majority of programmes struggle to ensure enough women take part.

"Service providers and commissioners should take action to improve the appeal of the programmes and promote them in a way that motivates female patients to attend. A range of options should be offered including community and self-management approaches, all of which have been shown to benefit patients."

Dr Mike Knapton, Associate Medical Director at the British Heart Foundation, said: "It is appalling that less than half of eligible female heart patients receive cardiac rehabilitation. Thousands of women are missing out on a vital step in their recovery, increasing their risk of another [heart](#) attack.

"That's why health services urgently need to make rehabilitation more accessible to women, who are either not referred or are put off attending, to help save more lives."

Provided by University of York

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