

Health and Social Services Committee

HSS(2)-06-05(p.7)

Date of meeting:	Wednesday 25 May 2005
Venue:	Committee Rooms 3&4, National Assembly for Wales
Title:	Men's Health Issues

Purpose

1. A paper for the Committee to note on National Men's Health Week 2005 and men's health issues.

Summary

2. National Men's Health Week 2005 runs from 13 - 19 June. The paper attached at Annexe 1 summarises information and key issues relating to men's health.

Background

3. Like socio-economic status, gender can affect health status and use of health care services. One major issue is the difference in life expectancy between men and women. The average life expectancy at birth for men in Wales is 75 years, compared to 80 years for women. Mortality and morbidity statistics show that men in Wales die earlier than women from a range of conditions including heart disease, lung cancer, colon cancer and accidents.

4. There are also differences in the ways that men and women access health care. Men use primary care services less than women, and are more likely to put off approaching the health services until their health problems become serious and a crisis arises. It has been suggested that many of the characteristics traditionally assigned to men in our culture (for example, not showing weakness; being prepared to take risks; and putting work before health needs) contribute directly or indirectly to men's ill health.

National Men's Health Week 2005

5. National Men's Health Week (NMHW) is organised by the Men's Health Forum, which aims to provide an independent and authoritative voice for male health and to tackle issues affecting the health and well-being of boys and men in England and Wales. The focus of NMHW 2005 is on raising awareness among men about weight and obesity issues, and informing health professionals and policy

makers about ways of engaging men in activities to lose weight. This issue has been selected because it is recognised to be a major public health problem. Recent data from the Welsh Health Survey suggest that 44 per cent of men in Wales are overweight and a further 17 per cent are obese.

6. During NMHW, local organisations will be encouraged to run events focusing on men and weight/obesity. The Forum is also producing a "Men and Weight" manual in the Haynes car manual format, designed to offer relevant information to men in a style that will appeal to them.

Activity in Wales: Men's Health Forum Cymru

7. The Men's Health Forum Cymru (MHFC) was formed in 2004, following interest generated by a regional launch event in Cardiff for National Men's Health Week 2004 organised by the Men's Health Forum for England and Wales. In its first year the Forum has made progress in terms of developing its membership base, raising its profile and generating awareness of the need for greater consideration of gender as an issue when tackling health in Wales. Membership currently includes representation from the NHS, local government, academic and voluntary sectors.

8. To publicise National Men's Health Week, MHFC is arranging for translation and dissemination of a bilingual version of the Haynes manual on men and weight. This resource will be launched on 15 June at an event at the Royal Welsh Showground which will be attended by the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services and by organisations that have been working in partnership with MHFC. This will be an opportunity to encourage health professionals and workplace advisors to consider new ways to engage more men in meeting Health Challenge Wales.

9. MHFC is also looking ahead to 2006, when the focus of National Men's Health Week will be on mental health. The Forum is identifying potential funding sources for a development worker to take forward work around men and mental health throughout the year and to organise events during the week itself. As well as increasing the capacity to support local groups in running NMHW events in 2006, this post will bring much needed dedicated time to take forward the development of MHFC. The Men's Health Forum for England and Wales supports MHFC in its aim of becoming by 2007 an independent registered charity with the capacity to represent the specific needs of men, and community groups working with men, in Wales.

Action Required

10. The Committee is invited to note the National Men's Health Week event on 15 June and the paper attached at Annexe 1 which summarises information and key issues relating to men's health.

Dr Brian Gibbons
Minister for Health and Social Services

Key Issues Relating To Men's Health

Why look at health in terms of gender?

1. Men's health has been defined as "Conditions or diseases that are unique to men, more prevalent in men, more serious among men, for which risk factors are different for men or for which different interventions are required for men".
2. Gender is important as a biological determinant of health, for example through higher female infant survival rates and women's longer life expectancy. The average life expectancy at birth for men in Wales is 75 years, compared to 80 years for women.
3. Gender also influences health outcomes through social and cultural factors. Many of the characteristics and attitudes traditionally assigned to men in our culture are seen as contributing directly or indirectly to men's ill health.

Men have traditionally been more likely to engage in behaviours known to lead to health problems and premature death, such as smoking, poor diet, and excessive consumption of alcohol. Although research shows that some of these gender differentials are now decreasing among younger age groups in Wales (young women now have higher smoking rates than young men), they continue to influence men's health.

4. Men also tend to be less informed about health issues than women, with less awareness of symptoms needing attention and their relative risk of different conditions. They are less likely to seek help from health care professionals and often consult a health professional as a last resort, when a problem has reached crisis point.
5. Biological and social determinants affecting health through gender are often compounded by social deprivation.

What specific health problems do men face?

6. The main health problems affecting men in Wales are:

- *Heart disease*: responsible for the deaths of nearly 4,000 men in Wales in 2002. Lifestyles factors such as smoking, unhealthy diet and lack of exercise increase the risk of heart disease.
- *Cancer*: Over 4,000 men in Wales died from cancer in 2002. The most common cause of cancer death in men in Wales is lung cancer, which kills over 1000 men per year. Colorectal and prostate cancer are other major causes of cancer death among men. Thirty per cent of all cancer deaths, including the majority of all lung cancer deaths, are attributed to smoking. Healthy diet combined with regular physical exercise has the potential to reduce deaths from colorectal and some other cancers.
- *Stroke*: Over 1,000 men die from stroke every year in Wales. Stroke is also one of the main causes of disability. Some of the risk factors for stroke - high blood pressure, smoking, lack of exercise and a diet high in fat and cholesterol - are controllable through lifestyles changes and medication.
- *Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)*: This is an overall term for a group of conditions including emphysema and chronic bronchitis, which killed nearly 1,000 men in Wales in 2002. The quality of life of someone with COPD diminishes as the disease progresses, as it becomes increasingly difficult to breathe and engage in physical activities. The main cause of COPD is smoking.
- *Accidents*: In 2000, nearly 400 men in Wales died in accidents. Alcohol is a contributing factor in many motor vehicle accidents, where deaths among men outnumber those among women by 3 to 1, as well as in other types of accidental death such as drowning and fire.
- *Suicide*: While male suicides continue to occur mainly among men over 75, concern has risen over the increase in recent years in deaths from suicide among men aged 15-44. These deaths among younger men tend to be linked to psychiatric illness, particularly depression, and to drug and alcohol misuse.

What evidence do we have for effective interventions targeting men?

7. There is a lack of evidence-based practice relating to effective health interventions undertaken for men. A number of projects have been identified in literature reviews and mapping studies, addressing a range of health issues including drug misuse, diet and exercise, mental and emotional health, sexual health, testicular cancer awareness and general "well man" projects. However, even for projects managed by well-established agencies, evaluation was usually very limited. Some approaches which emerged as promising include:

- Projects focusing on boys and young men in formal and informal youth settings. These can use groupwork approaches to address more holistic developmental and skills issues as well as specific health-related knowledge and risk behaviours.

- "Outreach" approaches that proactively target men with information and services in places which they already visit (sports venues, pubs, websites).
- Workplace health interventions. The workplace can be an advantageous environment for initiating and developing health promotion activities, and also provides an opportunity to target young men who traditionally have low GP consultation rates and are therefore less likely to benefit from opportunistic health promotion activity in primary care.
- Well-man clinics in community settings, e.g. drop-in centres.

What is the Welsh Assembly Government doing to promote men's health?

8. Health Challenge Wales, our national focus for efforts to improve health and prevent ill-health, emphasises that everyone has a role to play in protecting and improving health in Wales. The Assembly is playing its part through a range of prevention initiatives that are relevant to men. These include:

- A comprehensive national programme to reduce smoking. Our smoking campaigns have included specific messages to young men about the health benefits of not smoking. Recent data from Wales show a consistent trend of falling rates of smoking among boys. Hopefully this downward trend will be reflected in future declines in tobacco-related morbidity and mortality among men.
- The Nutrition Strategy for Wales, launched by the Assembly Government and the Food Standards Agency Wales in February 2003. The strategy notes the poorer dietary intakes of men compared to women and highlights the need to target men with nutritional information and support.
- *Climbing Higher*, the Assembly Strategy for Sport and Active Recreation which aims to increase levels of physical activity in Wales. Research shows that boys are more active than girls, but there is still a lot to be done to meet the activity levels required to achieve health benefits across the population.
- Collaboration with BBC Wales in 2004 on the *Big Fat Problem* campaign which aimed to tackle overweight and obesity by encouraging people across Wales, particularly men, to eat more healthily and get active.
- Since 2001 the Assembly has run a campaign in colleges, pubs and nightclubs to raise awareness of sexually transmitted infections and promote sexual health. A number of posters have targeted men, and evaluation shows that awareness of infections such as chlamydia has increased. The Assembly also supports a number of projects across Wales which offer information and advice on sexual health issues to young people, including young men. It also funds the Terrence Higgins Trust to carry out an all-Wales HIV prevention programme for gay men.

- As mentioned above, the workplace is an important setting for reaching men. The Assembly has developed the Corporate Health Standard, a programme to support, develop and reward good practice in workplace health promotion. Men's health issues are already included as a specific component in the Standard, and a recent independent review has recommended that this section should be developed further to address risk factors for cancers.

Sources of information

Men's Health Forum website: www.menshealthforum.org.uk

European Men's Health Forum: www.emhf.org

Chief Medical Officer's website: www.cmo.gov.uk/contents/work

Welsh Health Survey: October 2003-March 2004 (provisional results). SDR 82/2004, National Assembly for Wales