

# Health and Social Services Committee

**HSS(2)-04-06 (p1)**

**Date of meeting: 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

**Venue: Committee Room 3 & 4, Assembly Offices, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay**

**Title: Men's health issues and gender health inequality**

## **Purpose**

1. A paper for discussion by the Committee on men's health and gender health inequality.

## **Summary**

2. Gender can affect health status and use of health care services. This paper summarises key issues.

## **Background**

3. 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 women in Wales is 80 years, compared to 75 years for men.

4. Mortality statistics show that men in Wales die earlier than women from a range of conditions including heart disease, lung cancer, colon cancer and accidents.

5. The specific health problems faced by men in Wales and some key issues are outlined in Annex A. Women also face gender specific health issues (e.g. breast cancer), but these will not be discussed in this paper.

## **Consideration**

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

7. Men also tend to be less informed about health issues than women, with less awareness of symptoms

needing attention and the relative risk of different conditions. They are less likely to seek help from healthcare professionals and often this is the last resort, when the problem has reached crisis point.

8. The poorer state of men's health is now well known but there is a lack of evidence-based practice relating to effective interventions undertaken for men.

9. The Gender Equality Duty 2007 will place a duty on all public sector bodies (including health providers) to deliver services in such a way to promote equality between men and women.

## **Financial implications**

10. All current activities (Annex A) are funded from existing programme budgets and no financial implications are expected. The Health and Social Care Resources Directorate has seen and noted that there are no additional financial implications arising from this paper. (GH 2406)

## **Action Required**

11. The Committee is invited to consider the committee paper and paper attached at Annex A.

Dr Brian Gibbons AM

Minister for Health and Social Services

## **Annex A**

### **Health and Social Services Committee**

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Specific health problems faced by men in Wales:

- 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: Men are twice as likely as women both to develop and to die from the 10 most common cancers affecting both sexes. 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.

- **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:** In all age groups the rate of suicide in males is around three times higher than that in females. The last forty years have seen striking reductions in suicide in males aged 55+ and in females of all ages. Suicide rates have doubled in 15-24 year old men and increased by approximately 60% in 25-34 year olds. This latter age group now has the highest rates of all age- sex- groups. These deaths among younger men tend to be linked to psychiatric illness, particularly depression, and to drug and alcohol misuse.

## **Evidence base for effective interventions targeting men:**

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 have 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.

## **Activity in Wales**

## Prostate Cancer Screening

The National Screening Committee has not recommended a national screening programme for prostate cancer. All screening programmes cause some harm and when considering population screening programmes the benefits and harm must be carefully assessed, and the benefits should always outweigh the harm. Until there is clear evidence to show that a national screening programme will bring more benefit than harm, the NHS will not be inviting men who have no symptoms for prostate cancer screening. Instead, men are supported in taking an informed decision about whether or not to take the PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) test. The Welsh Assembly Government has produced an information leaflet for this purpose. In addition, there is now a website that contains a decision aid tool [http://www.prosdex.com/index\\_content.htm](http://www.prosdex.com/index_content.htm)

In Wales new National Cancer Standards were published in June 2005 and include those for urological cancer, which incorporates cancer of the prostate. The standards look at the whole patient care pathway and are being taken forward by the Cancer Networks to ensure that their requirements are achieved in full by March 2009.

## Health Improvement

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:

- It has already been mentioned that there is a lack of evidence-based practice relating to the effective health interventions undertaken for men. However the strongest sources of evidence come from the area of workplace health promotion. The Assembly Government has developed the Corporate Health Standard, a programme to support, develop and reward good practice in workplace health promotion. Within the Standard, organisations are required to have a planned approach to health promotion and there are specific criteria targeting men's health issues.
- 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.

- 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.

## **Men's Health Forum**

- The Men's Health Forum Cymru (MHFC) was formed in 2004 following interest generated by a regional launch in Cardiff of National Men's Health Week 2004 organised by the Men's Health Forum for England and Wales. The Forum has made progress in terms of developing its membership base, raising its profile and generating awareness for the greater consideration of gender as an issue when tackling health in Wales. Membership includes representation from the NHS, local government, academic and voluntary sectors.
- National Men's Health Week is organised by the Forum and aims to provide an independent and authoritative voice for males health and to tackle the issues affecting the health and well-being of boys and men in England and Wales. The theme for Men's Health Week 2006 is mental health and well-being and will take place between the 12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June.

## **Sources of information**

Men's Health Forum: [www.menshealthforum.org.uk](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk)

European Men's Health Forum: [www.emhf.org](http://www.emhf.org)

Welsh Health Survey: October 2003-March 2004, National Assembly for Wales