

Treatment for erectile dysfunction among older men from Northern Ireland

Main findings

- In Northern Ireland 46.5% of men aged 60+ reported moderate/severe erectile dysfunction.
- 25% of these men reported being offered treatment to improve erections in the past 3 years.
- Of those men offered treatment 29% said that they currently use it and find it helpful.

What we already know

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is common among older men. However, the number of men diagnosed and treated for the condition is low compared to the number of men that report it. We aim to identify the degree to which older men are offered treatment for the condition. This will help define the level of unmet need among men living in Northern Ireland (NI).

What did we do?

Ten thousand men from NI were sent a survey by post during September and October 2016. Responses were received from just under one third of men. The questions in the survey covered a range of topics. Firstly, characteristics of the men were collected. These included routine items such as age, marital status and employment status. Height, weight, and amount of physical activity taken each week were also requested. Secondly, topics on general health were covered. The most important of these was having a long-term medical condition such as a heart condition, high blood pressure or diabetes. More specific questions were asked relating to sexual problems and being offered treatment for these problems. While personal in nature, completeness of these questions was high. Using this data we reported on treatment levels for ED among older men living in NI. We also investigated how receipt of treatment for the condition varied between men with different characteristics, such as their age and health.

What did we find?

Almost half of older men living in NI reported ED to a moderate or big degree. However, only one quarter of these men reported being offered treatment to improve erections over the past three years. The proportion of men being offered treatment decreased as age increased. Men reporting a higher level of interest in sex, or more long-term medical conditions were more likely to receive treatment. Among men reporting ED who were offered medication, just over one quarter found it helpful and currently use it. Overall nine out of ten men who reported ED had no help with it due to not being offered treatment or not finding the treatment helpful.

How will these results be used?

Despite high levels of ED among older men, the majority of men with the condition do not get help with it. This may be a consequence of lack of availability of treatment through the NHS in NI compared to other parts of the UK. However, it also suggests that health care professionals need to engage more proactively with older men. They need to discuss sexual health routinely and follow up those treated for the condition. This is particularly important given the already established relationship with other medical conditions such as heart disease.