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MENTAL HEALTH

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Serious Depression Raises Risk of Heart Ailments

A large Swedish study published last week reports that men and women hospitalized for depression are about one and a half times as likely as others to develop coronary heart disease. The risk is even greater for people hospitalized before age 50.

The researchers identified 44,826 men and women hospitalized for depression from 1987 to 2001 in Sweden, and then traced their history of heart disease using the Swedish national discharge registry. The study appears in the December issue of *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

As patients get older, the risk declines, and people ages 70 to 79 at

the onset of depression have no increased risk for cardiac illness compared with people in control groups. But those hospitalized for depression from age 25 to 49 were almost three times as likely to suffer heart attacks as those not hospitalized.

The association between severe depression and heart disease held even after accounting for socioeconomic status and geography.

According to Dr. Kristina Sundquist, the senior author and an associate professor of medicine at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, this strong association between severe depression and heart disease suggests that treating depression could be a preventive.

"However," she said, "in order to find evidence that successfully treated depression would make the risk for heart disease decrease, other types of studies are needed, such as randomized controlled studies."

Dr. Sundquist said she doubted that such a study could be ethically undertaken because it would require a control group of untreated patients.



AT-RISK

Men With Dysfunction Should Ask About Heart

Erectile dysfunction is almost as strong a predictor of heart disease as smoking or family history, according to a report published last week in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Researchers studied 3,816 men with erectile dysfunction and 4,247 men with no dysfunction, and they tracked the incidence of angina, heart attack, arrhythmias, stroke and other heart problems over seven years. Men who reported erectile dysfunction before or during the study had a 45 percent increased risk of a cardiovascular event compared with men who never reported the problem.

"Erectile dysfunction is treatable," said Dr. Ian M. Thompson, the lead author of the report and chairman of urology at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. "It may be the event that gets a man in to see a

doctor. That patient should ask his physician: 'I used to smoke. My dad died of a heart attack. Now I have E.D. Do I need further evaluation?' Then the doctor has additional responsibilities to think about cardiac illness as well."

The link between erectile dysfunction and cardiovascular disease, the authors write, has previously been established, but the magnitude of the effect has not been known until now.

The authors acknowledge that the results depend on patient reports of erectile dysfunction that may be difficult to assess and that they did not collect data on blood pressure medications or medications for erectile dysfunction, which may have altered the results.

Still, the association held even after controlling for smoking, cholesterol level, family history and other factors.