



Speaker's Corner - moustache aficionado Dr Tony Grewal looks at men's health issues for "Movember"

This month moustache aficionado Dr Tony Grewal looks at men's health issues for "Movember", Londonwide LMCs staff raised over £100 for the Movember charity.

Tony writes:

November is the month when men all over the country sprout ridiculous facial hair (no hypocrisy here!) to raise awareness of men's health issues.

The Movember charity we raised money for places a particular emphasis on prostate and testicular cancers, mental health and low levels of physical activity. There is evidence that awareness raising and appropriate screening can be effective, and it is well recognised that brief interventions from a trusted health professional have significant influence on lifestyle.

Men are, however, notorious for avoiding doctors, ignoring symptoms and being loth to engage in screening activity. What can and should we do to change this? As a very reluctant recipient of medical and screening input myself (and a classic medically qualified denier!), my thoughts include:

Try to emphasise the value of early intervention, particularly where there is good evidence for this.

Learn how to offer advice which produces changes in behaviour, rather than simply repeating health advice which is already well known. Such advice is superficially accepted, and only causes the patient to duck the issue in future for fear of being challenged.

Reinforce the good work being done to improve the de-stigmatisation of mental health issues.

Look for opportunities to reach the rare attenders – typically young and middle aged adult males. Although keep it in context - offering unasked for health and screening advice in the pub or sports club may result in significant and physical rejection!

Use contact with other family members to encourage appropriate attendance or offer advice, along the lines of "I haven't seen Jack in quite a while – how's he doing?", "While you're here, do feel any others in the family/friends/etc would find this leaflet helpful?".

Ensure that if men can choose to see a male nurse or doctor for advice, this is well publicised.

We are well versed in providing facts and statistics to jolt patients into action, but sometimes we may need to emphasise the positives of early intervention. Patients have everything to gain and nothing to fear from raising health concerns early. Below are some statistics which may help to demonstrate this.

Prostate cancer

We are diagnosing more prostate cancer, which of course means we can treat it: UK prostate cancer diagnosis was 32 per 100,000 in 1975. This has more than trebled over the past 40 years: the most recent data has it at 105 per 100,000. And 84% of men diagnosed in England and Wales survive for ten years or more.

Source: Cancer Research UK

Testicular cancer

The most common cancer in British men aged 25-49, diagnosis rates for testicular cancer have doubled since the 1970s but stabilised recently, so it looks like current diagnostic processes are as good as they can get. Nearly all men diagnosed at the earliest stage survived the disease for five years, falling to 80% when diagnosed at the latest stage.

Source: Cancer Research UK

Mental health

Men's mental health is a harder area in which to show the benefits of early intervention but it is worth noting that attitudes are starting to change. Mental health charities report an increase in calls to them following media reports of high profile male role-models publicly overcoming or managing mental illness.

Source: Men's Health Forum

It is widely acknowledged that the sheer fear of being diagnosed with a mental health condition or cancer - testicular, prostate or otherwise - means a

lot of men ignore any lump they may have found and pray it goes away. I hope that the above tips encourage more of the, to seek help at the earliest moment possible.