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## MALES URGED TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF THEIR HEALTH - MENS HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

*29 May 2015:* Early Mortality and morbidity rates among South African men are higher when compared to women, according to insurance claim statistics from PPS. Lifestyle issues such as obesity, lack of exercise, poor diet and long working hours are some of the most critical elements in the development of non-communicable diseases among men which contributes to earlier mortality and morbidity rates.

Dr Dominique Stott, Executive: Medical Standards and Services at PPS, says that in light of Men's Health Awareness Month celebrated in June, men of all ages should be encouraged to take the necessary steps to improve their lifestyles, health and overall wellness.

She explains that daily routines characterised by stressful environments, combined with unhealthy lifestyles, means it is imperative for men to start taking their health seriously. "Men are increasingly suffering the consequences of poor health choices and don't pay enough attention to subsequent warning symptoms, which may herald the onset of serious impending health issues."

In her opinion, younger men are more prone to partake in risk-taking behaviour, such as excessive alcohol or drug intake and smoking, which leads to consequences including motor vehicle accidents, injuries or even suicide. However, in the case of older men, the most common causes of ill health are cancer, strokes and heart disease. Heart disease is overall the fourth highest cause of death in SA after HIV/AIDS, TB and violence. Contributory causes of heart disease among men include issues such as diabetes, obesity, raised cholesterol, smoking and hypertension.

She states that another common cause of health issues among men derive from unrecognised and untreated psychiatric conditions. "When compared to women, men are often more reluctant to seek medical advice which in turn causes long periods of poor social and professional functioning."

Men must realise that even though they may feel fine, it is important to go for regular check-ups and alert their doctor about any unusual physical or psychological symptoms, she says. "It is essential for all men above the age of 25 to get their cholesterol, blood pressure and blood glucose levels checked annually by their medical doctor, especially if the person has a family history of a prior mentioned health condition or is overweight."

It is also advisable for men to conduct monthly testicular self-examination to note any unusual lumps, bumps or changes. She explains that something as simple as a tiny lump on the testicle should be

investigated, as testicular cancer is the most prevalent cancer in men from ages 15-35, outside cancers associated with HIV.

“From the age of 45 and up, it is important to have a screening prostate blood test conducted as prostate cancer usually becomes a greater risk from this age. By conducting regular check-ups, cancer can be detected and treated early.”

We are also seeing an increased amount of claims coming in from physical injuries that males sustain from cycling due to the increasing number of participants in this sport, says Dr Stott.

In addition, erectile dysfunction of varying degrees is increasingly being diagnosed in men, and about 50% of men over the age of 40 reportedly suffer from it, says Dr Stott. Men who cycle more than three hours per week face a risk of erectile dysfunction (ED) by 1,7 times. It is therefore imperative that male cyclists adjust their bicycle seat correctly as it can cause pressure in the perineum.

Men should make an increased effort to eat well and stay active, she advises. Even doing moderate exercise for 30 minutes most days of the week can be very beneficial to physical and mental health in the long term. “Find some time for relaxation and allow yourself to unwind with your loved ones. Many men tend to assume that diseases such as cancer, heart disease or ED won’t affect them. In spite of how invincible men might feel, these diseases can affect anyone and by making an effort to improve overall health and wellness, men will be able to detect and treat these diseases before it is too late,” concludes Dr Stott.