



SA PROFESSIONALS AT RISK OF DEVELOPING HYPERTENSION

Longer working hours and increased stress levels are becoming increasingly common amongst many working professionals. However, this demanding lifestyle can result in a number of health problems including an increased risk of developing permanently raised blood pressure, also known as hypertension.

A recent study of more than 7,000 civil servants in the UK conducted at University College London over a 13-year period, found that office workers who regularly work 11-hour days or more were 67% more likely to develop heart disease than those who worked seven or eight-hour days.

Ahead of World Hypertension Day on Tuesday May 17, Dr Dominique Stott, Executive at PPS, the specialist financial services provider to graduate professionals, says it is essential for anyone who does have a stressful occupation to be aware of the dangers. "Hypertension is a chronic disease for which there is no real cure but it is manageable with medication and/or lifestyle changes. However, as with most diseases, the earlier it is detected and treated, the better."

She says one of the challenges is that it is a 'silent disease' that tends to go undetected with the first symptom often being a stroke, but which can have devastating consequences. "Hypertension will affect organs that are susceptible to an increase in internal pressure. In the brain it can lead to dementia; in the eyes to reduced vision or blindness; in the kidneys to organ failure and in the heart to an enlarged heart and heart disease, including heart attacks.

Dr Stott says that while hypertension is typically found in people over the age of 50 years, it is also commonly associated with family history. "It is important for older people to be screened annually as they comprise the majority of cases. However, it is also vital for those who have a genetic predisposition towards the disease to be screened regularly. Left untreated, hypertension in a younger person can shorten their lifespan by up to 20 years."

"For anyone who may be at risk of developing hypertension, it is essential to ensure that they have some form of life cover in place as early as possible, as the onset of the diseases commonly leads to a loading of premium or a decline in life and other risk benefits. Due to the effect of hypertension on the body causing increased mortality, it is often strictly underwritten at application stage.

Graham Anderson, Principal Officer at Profmed Medical Scheme, says hypertension is also more commonly found in the black population and is fast becoming a more common problem among the urban black population, due to a western lifestyle being adopted in these areas. "Kidney failure for example is four times higher in the black population due to the high incidence of hypertension in this group. In a six year study of patients with chronic kidney failure, hypertension was reported to be the cause of chronic kidney failure in 34,6% of blacks but only 4,3% of whites."

“Unmanaged stress in the workplace can lead to the production of excessive amounts of adrenalin and cortisone which over an extended period can lead to raised blood pressure. It is therefore advisable for anyone who has a stressful job or a family history of hypertension, to make the necessary changes to their lifestyle such as regular exercise and a good diet as well as have regular check-ups, to help prevent or at least mitigate the onset of the disease.”