



AWARENESS VITAL IN PREVENTING ONSET OF HEART DISEASE

8 July 2011: Five heart attacks occur every hour in South Africa, with one in four of these proving fatal, according to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of SA. While there is no single risk factor that leads to heart disease, it is essential for anyone who may be prone to developing a heart-related illness to have the correct medical benefits in place.

Ahead of Heart Awareness Month in September, Dr Dominique Stott, Business Development Executive at PPS, says heart disease and heart-related diseases typically occur in people who have a history of smoking, a lack of exercise, poor diet and stress. “Aside from lifestyle, a critical factor in the development of heart disease is family history. If a mother or sister under the age of 65, or father or brother under the age of 55 years, developed heart disease, this is considered a significant risk factor.”

“Age is also a contributing factor as the older one gets, the greater the chance that heart disease is likely to develop. While it is less common in women under 50 than men, due to the protective effects of female hormones, this risk starts to equalise between the sexes over the age of 50.”

Dr Stott says that while consumers cannot do anything about their family history or age, it is important to make sure that one has the right benefits in place. “Heart disease is the second highest cause of dread disease claims, which makes it imperative that a dread disease benefit is considered part of any insurance portfolio. “The benefit of having dread disease cover in place is especially important even for those people who have a medical aid, as it can be used to top up funds providing treatment additional to that of the medical aid such as needing a driver, decreased income due to time off sick or additional treatment such as counseling.”

She says it is also important for anyone, but especially those who may be prone to developing the disease, to make the necessary changes to their lifestyle. “Even with a family history, the chances of developing heart disease can be reduced by not smoking, controlling blood pressure and cholesterol, increasing exercise, and keeping one’s weight under control.

According to Graham Anderson, principal officer at Profmed Medical Scheme, symptoms such as chest pain, especially if associated with nausea or sweating, must be investigated immediately by a doctor or clinic. “Chest pain which spreads to the left arm, neck, back, stomach or jaw is considered a classic symptom of heart related problems. The sooner treatment is sought, the greater the chance of survival if the problem is heart related.”

“The first step for anyone who believes that they may be at risk is to have their cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure checked at their local doctor or clinic. Based on these results, treatment may be recommended.”

Anderson says that by modifying one’s lifestyle, conducting relevant check-ups and ensuring sufficient medical cover is in place - especially for those who do fall into the heart disease risk category - consumers can not only reduce the chance of suffering from a heart attack but also ensure that they are comprehensively covered by their medical scheme, should such symptoms develop.