

HEALTH AND STRESS

*The Newsletter of
The American Institute of Stress*

Number 7

1998

IMPOTENCE ↔ STRESS ↔ SEX AND THE VAGARIES OF VIAGRA

KEY WORDS:erectile failure, penile prostheses, libido, sexual revolution, black market, drug interactions, FDA

There can be little doubt that diminished sexual prowess, and certainly complete impotency, is a pervasive and powerful source of stress for senior citizens. But the subject was seldom discussed until very recently for several reasons. Save for sporadic exceptions about celebrities who allegedly fathered children in their seventies and eighties, everyone seemed to be in the same boat. Many were also suspicious that the much younger wives of these elderly studs may have had some help from others. It was generally assumed that failure to perform, like gray hair, was an unavoidable consequence of aging.

Talking about the problem with your friends or family was embarrassing and demeaning. Few brought the subject up with their family physicians for similar reasons, or because they correctly assumed that little help was available. Those that complained were usually referred to a neurologist, urologist, or psychiatrist, to determine whether the problem was physical or mental. In some instances, medications were found to be the culprit, since things returned to normal when they were stopped.

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An association with diabetes was well established, and could be the first indication of its presence in some patients. Unfortunately, even when this was diagnosed, treatment often failed to help. Similarly, when other causes could be found, there was little likelihood of relief unless you were willing to undergo surgical implantation of some semirigid or malleable rods, or tubes to inflate. However, there was no guarantee that these would be successful, horror stories of infections and other complications that might cause permanent damage were common, as was controversy over which prosthesis worked better. They were also costly, and often not covered by insurance.

A cylindrical device that fit snugly over your unruly member along with a rubber ring that encircled its base was a subsequent option. Hand pumping it created a vacuum that drew in blood which the doughnut-like ring prevented from leaving. Although much less expensive, since it did not require an operation, you had to get the right fit, plan ahead with precision, and wonder what your mate was thinking while you were going through this process, which closely resembled something that teenagers did to relieve their sexual tensions. The pleasure of the event was frequently diminished by pain or difficulty in ejaculation. Moreover, all of the above approaches quickly destroyed any sense of spontaneity or romance.

Impotence caused stress, but it was equally clear that the reverse was true, particularly the stress associated with fear of failing. One definition of fear was "The first time you can't get it up twice", as opposed to panic, "The second time you couldn't get it up once."

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The American Institute of Stress*

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Nocturnal penile tumescence monitoring was touted as a way to find out if the trouble was upstairs rather than down below. This required the patient to be fitted with a flexible wire ring that served as a snug loop around his flaccid penis. The loop is connected to a recording device that constantly records its degree of tension, and instructions are given on how to set the contraption up at home and test it. Healthy men, including senior citizens, usually have one or more erections every night of which they are unaware, unless they suddenly wake up to this welcome surprise. During an erection, the increased circumference of the ring can readily be measured and timed on the tracing, and men with long standing impotency often demonstrated prolonged periods of significant distention.

For some, the simple reassurance that they still have the ability to perform relieves their stress, and can work wonders. You could also simply wrap one layer of scotch tape around, instead of the wire ring. While not as precise, it is more dramatically convincing when you find it broken in the morning.

A major treatment breakthrough came after it was found that injecting vasodilator drugs like phentolamine, papaverine, or aprostadil into the penis, either alone, or in combination, could produce startling results. This development was delivered by Dr. Giles Brindley, a British physician with a flair for the dramatic, at the 1983 annual meeting of the American Urological Association in Las Vegas.

Brindley simply stepped in front of the podium and dropped his trousers. Moments earlier, he had injected himself with a drug he had been experimenting with, and there it was, standing proud and erect before a room full of amazed, if not envious doctors and reporters of both sexes. Farther down the Strip, Siegfried and Roy were making a white Bengal tiger disappear, and two circus aerialists, one sitting on the other's shoulders, were traversing a tightrope without a net. But even Vegas had never seen a show like this. Within weeks, doctors were taking and prescribing injections, even though the medication was not FDA approved for that purpose until two years later. But there could be some drawbacks, including scarring, infection, and occasionally, priapism, a persistent but painful erection that required injection of potentially dangerous drugs to get prompt relief.

The next advance was inserting one of these drugs into the urethra. The MUSE system used a pre-filled applicator to deliver an aprostadil pellet about one inch into the urethral opening, which usually resulted in an erection within 10 minutes that could last 30 minutes to an hour. While not as dangerous or uncomfortable as sticking in a needle, there were side effects of aching in the penis and testicles, and urethral pain, burning and inflammation.

There were all sorts of other remedies. Long before the current alternative medicine craze, ginseng was touted for its ability to improve both sexual appetite and prowess. Various forms of this could be found in any health food store, alone, or in combination with other herbs like *Ginkgo biloba*, which improved blood flow, and were used for similar purposes. Yohimbine, a natural alkaloid found in the bark of certain trees and plants was also readily available and popular. It had been shown to have effects on the sympathetic and parasympathetic system that could theoretically favor increased blood flow to the penis that seemed to provide some scientific support, but research results were mixed. It is still listed in the PDR as being indicated for the treatment of male impotence of diabetic, vascular, or psychogenic origin, and as having aphrodisiac properties. There were all sorts of vitamins, magnets, and electromagnetic devices, and ground up rhinoceros horn was so popular, that poaching made them an endangered species. Nitroglycerin cream was applied locally, because some believed its vasodilating effects could help achieve, sustain, or strengthen an erection. Viagra has pretty much made all of these history.

The Senior Citizen Sexual Revolution

An appreciation of how profoundly Viagra has changed the lives of many middle aged and elderly individuals is best obtained by citing some examples reported in the Press. Equally impressive is the way it has changed the way we and the media now freely use terms and discuss subjects that were formerly taboo. Just a few decades ago, it was considered bad form in certain circles so speak of a "breast" of chicken, the word pregnant was not allowed on television, married couples slept in twin beds, and the word penis was forbidden. However, it was not possible to write about Lorena Bobbit's surgery on her husband, Jennifer Flowers and Monica Lewinsky's alleged affairs with the President, or Marv Albert's "kinky sex", without opening some cracks in the armor of modesty and decorum. But Viagra has almost dismantled it. People are now describing sex acts and sex organs at dinner parties, arguing whether oral sex constitutes adultery and the President should submit to an examination of his genitalia, or trading jokes about oral sex in the presence of females, who often have no compunction about contributing their own. As one hostess commented, "the word 'erection' is something I couldn't say until six weeks ago."

Even more amazing, is that most who provided glowing testimonials or expressed strong opinions, had no reluctance about providing their names and indicating where they lived. And they were very clearly identified in widely read publications like *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*.

Jack Finestein, an 86 year old retired financial planner from Margate, Florida, had become depressed when he was unable to have the active sex he once enjoyed with his 81 year old lady friend. "I had felt so strongly about my manly ability, I didn't want to go near her." He tried all sorts of vitamins and herbal supplements, as well as several mail order potency cures, and various combinations of these to no avail. After taking two 50 mg. Viagra pills, he and his companion made love in the afternoon for the first time in three years. "It was wonderful. I was so elated, I felt I had conquered the world." He says the drug has already opened up the possibility of other candidates to conquer if his companion has to move into an assisted living facility because of health problems. "I'll get out. I love to dance." Until then, he is content to have sex as often as she is able. He hopes a trip to Miami Beach will be the right moment to try again, and, "When we go to the ocean, I'll instigate it".

Arnold Levinstein, 76, from nearby Boca Raton, was able to have sex for the first time in a decade with his 69 year old wife. Roxanne, who was quoted as saying, "I feel like a bride again." Murray, a 59 year old from Fort Lauderdale who asked that his last name be withheld, had been impotent for years because of diabetes and medications for hypertension. He also tried various remedies, and even joined a health club, hoping it would improve his condition. Since starting on Viagra, he has been able to have intercourse once a week. He thought he would have a heart attack after playing tennis and collapsing a few weeks previously, and is aware of reports of Viagra associated deaths in patients with cardiovascular disease. However, he is not worried, noting "I don't care about living forever, and I couldn't think of a better way to go."

Dorothy Greenberg, a 76 year old Delray Beach widow is also hopeful that the drug will brighten up her life, and makes no bones about it. "I am a sexual woman. I could use someone on Viagra because it would give me what I need." Although others are not as forthright, she will have lots of competition. Widows far outnumber eligible male companions in Florida retirement communities, and have been known to go to unusual lengths to establish some sort of relationship, even without any assurance that their sexual needs will be fulfilled. The advent of Viagra will surely turn this into a feeding frenzy, and even for frail looking 86 year-olds like Jack Finestein, finding a mate or a one night stand should be like shooting fish in a barrel.

A *Wall Street Journal* article also pointed out that "older women looking for a few good men, fear that Viagra will worsen an already frustrating shortage of candidates by sending aging bachelors into the arms of younger women." Sylvia Diamond, 70, widowed after 50 years of marriage, was interviewed "sitting with her legs crossed, in a black miniskirt, black stockings and pumps, as she looked disapprovingly over the field of sports-jacketed men fox-trotting at a senior singles night at Temple Sinai in Delray Beach. They're so conceited already. Imagine if they are able to perform." Because of its large geriatric population, Florida accounts for ten percent of all U.S. Viagra prescriptions. And most of these senior citizens don't look or act their age. They join health clubs or exercise regularly, play tennis and golf several times a week, dress the same as thirty year-olds, and revel in their rediscovered youth.

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But one can only imagine the reactions of their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren back North. Will they be ashamed or proud? It used to be that nobody even thought about their parents, much less grandparents having sex. And if they did have suspicions, they rarely ever talked about it, and certainly not to the participants. That's all changed drastically because of Viagra, not only because of its effect on senior citizens pursuing an active life style, but also residents of nursing homes, where sex is often a thorny issue that is difficult to settle for all involved.

In many instances, children can't accept the fact that their elderly parents, who may have spent years without a companion, now want to take full advantage of their new opportunities for socialization and sexual activity. Rosemary McDonald, a nurse who coordinates care for the elderly at a facility in Massachusetts, cited the case of an elderly woman with osteoporosis who sustained a hip fracture during sex. When her daughter learned about this she was outraged, demanding to know, "why was she allowed to have intercourse?" Some people go so far as to insist that their parents be transferred to another nursing home to avoid contact with a consenting sexual partner. Even nursing-home staff can have difficulty accepting sex between willing and mentally competent patients, particularly if a person has more than one partner. Some staff members also become outraged, and have requested that patients "be drugged," for exposing themselves or masturbating in front of others, and reading pornographic magazines.

To this, McDonald, who is sometimes referred to as "The Sex Nurse", responds: "We cannot forget the word adult. Sexuality is a basic human need. It's like food and water." Other authorities also agree that sexual activity among the elderly is normal, and needs to be addressed, not overlooked, in extended care facilities. A major problem is lack of privacy. Some nursing homes have only one private room, the chapel, where patients might be able to escape being caught in the act. But there is no guarantee of this, ingenuity is required since no bed is available, and some partners might consider it sacrilegious. Alternatives that will provide "uninterrupted time" are sorely needed. There is little doubt that Viagra will be smuggled in by friends and intensify these problems, even in centenarians. McDonald recalled a recent conversation about Viagra with a 101-year-old male patient, who told her "If I had a sex partner," he said, "I'd be first in line."

Legal And Reimbursement Repercussions

Although only available for a few months, Viagra has already been responsible for a variety of legal actions. Larry Demorest, an 89-year-old Orlando widower, was jailed for the attempted murder of 34-year-old Kimberly Hearier after she rejected his Viagra-charged advances. She told sheriff's deputies that she had lived at his home off and on for 10 years, during which they "had a romantic relationship." She explained that his passion had been building up ever since a prostitute took off with his money two days previously when he couldn't perform. He took some Viagra, but when Hearier refused to have sex with him, even for money, he tried to club her to death with a crowbar. Demorest said she made up the story, and that his doctor prescribed the Viagra because of a painful case of shingles that had prevented his amorous pursuits for months. "I might look good, but I'm still pushing 100. For a man my age, I've got more than normal drive. With the right partner I can get along, but I don't pay prostitutes and stuff like that."

Viagra brought estranged lovers together again, but on opposite sides in a New York State Supreme Court, where Francis Bernardo was being sued for \$2 million by Roberta "Bobbi" Burke because of Viagra induced philandering. She stated that they had lived together for 10 years, and submitted papers showing that they had signed into a South Carolina yacht club as "Mr. and Mrs. Bernardo." However, he had been impotent until May 1, when he popped the small blue pill, and they had sex for the first time in four years. Two days later, her 70 year old lover walked out, leaving a note boasting of his new powers. Bernardo's lawyer, who slipped and called Burke "Mrs. Bernardo", during the proceedings, could possibly now wind up as her witness if the case goes to trial. He argued that though they had lived together for 10 years, his tax return showed that he had filed as a single person, and that during this period, "he's also lived with another woman and has seen other women." The law suit is both a divorce and palimony action, and may hinge on whether New York recognizes common-law marriages from South Carolina. The Mineola judge told the lawyers to start negotiating, and although Bernardo's lawyer admitted that an offer was made to drop charges for what he described as "a very modest settlement", he had decided against this on principle, since they are not married. Both sides must now submit additional documents before another hearing date is set.

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Oxford Health Plans and other health insurers were sued in a class action on May 19 for refusing to provide full coverage for Viagra. The lead plaintiff, Paul Sibley-Schreiber, is a diabetic with organic impotence diagnosed by a physician. After taking Viagra, he had sex for the first time in six years, and was now going full tilt. Connecticut based Oxford informed him that it would not cover Viagra prescriptions until they had more information, and that a decision would not be made until the end of June. However, he argued that they did cover self-administered penile injection and a urethral suppository for impotence, both of which are painful. "Clearly the issue is neither the per-patient cost of Viagra nor the necessity of providing a treatment for impotence. The sudden financial hit simply has insurance providers running for cover, seeking any excuse they can to evade their obligations to policyholders."

And there is little doubt that fiscal intermediaries are shook up and confused. Some insurance companies plan to only cover patients with evidence of a pre-existing condition of organic impotence, or if there is other proof, limiting reimbursement to the cost of prior impotence treatments. Cigna Health Care agreed to cover those patients already being reimbursed for injections or penile implants, and allows 6 pills a month. For new cases, a co-payment will be required. United Healthcare covers up to 8 pills monthly for its six million members. Patient co-payments range from \$5 to \$25 depending on the plan. A 48-year-old patient from Memphis, Tenn., who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Prudential HealthCare paid for the first six pills he used to overcome his diabetes-induced impotence. "I'm hoping they'll cover me next month... I'm not going to tell you I'm 19 again, but it works." As of June 22, Prudential Insurance Company of America, the parent company, had not made a final decision. California's WellPoint Health Networks announced on May 1 that it had decided to limit liability to only their commercial clients, but policies for all these companies are likely to change, because they must keep up with the competition.

An Aetna US Healthcare release on June 17 said that it will not pay for Viagra unless New York employers buy special coverage, "because company managers don't think sex is medically necessary." It claims that Viagra could cost it more than \$50 million a year. An Aetna spokesperson said that while the policy will apply in New York, she did not know whether this decision would be extended nationwide.

Kaiser Permanente originally said it was considering covering only half the drug's cost. However, the California HMO giant apparently changed its mind, and has now decided not to provide any reimbursement because it's too expensive. Analysts note that Kaiser is trying to recover from last year's \$270 million deficit, and that national coverage of for its 9.1 million members would cost at least \$100 million annually. This is almost double the amount it spent last year for all antiviral drugs, including the expensive protease inhibitors for the AIDS virus. If they did provide coverage, rates would have to go up for all members, and many would object. However, they will offer employers the option of paying extra for Viagra coverage. According to a recent poll, 49 percent of Americans feel it should be covered, forty percent said no, and 11 percent were undecided. Many also contend that any company paying for Viagra, should cover birth control and fertility drugs.

Many prescription plans encourage subscribers to obtain a 90-day supply of medically necessary drugs obtained from a specified pharmacy or mail order facility to cut costs. But it may be difficult for doctors to disprove a patient's claim of impotency and therefore a medical need, or determining what a 90-day supply should be. Because Viagra is a pay-as-you-go drug and not a daily pill, insurers have to answer a tough question; "How often is often enough to have sex?" Who will be responsible for making that decision, doctors, patients, or disinterested actuaries?

Use of Medicaid money for Viagra is also coming under fire, and some states are considering appealing to Congress for financial assistance. Indiana's Governor recently announced that he is looking for some legal loophole to get out of paying for the pill, which cost the state over \$3600 the second week in June. Most of the two million men who have taken Viagra since it came out paid for it themselves, and 59% of all new prescriptions are still paid in cash. Eugene Cassidy, 61, a resident of North Palm Beach, has already spent \$300 without bothering to check on whether his Blue Cross insurance will pay, explaining that "I probably spend more than that on fishing, and I have twice as much fun on Viagra." Others point out that they will readily spend \$10 or more for the pleasure they get from a bottle of wine, which doesn't even begin to compare with the enjoyment that Viagra brings them. In addition it also provides pleasure for their companions, many of whom are increasingly considering taking it themselves.

Viagra For Women?

Women are clamoring for Viagra because of reports that taking it will make sex more enjoyable for them. One study found that 58 percent of women complained of discomfort during intercourse, dryness, increased time for arousal, diminished ability to reach orgasm, or decreased clitoral sensation. Could Viagra correct any of these problems? The clitoris is the same organ as the penis, and although much smaller, has the same number of nerve endings, but packed in a smaller space. Since the drug gives men prolonged erections by engorging the penis with blood and making it more sensitive, it should have the same effect on the clitoris, and this now appears to be true.

Hundreds of female volunteers in four European cities are now taking different doses of Viagra or a placebo to satisfy safety and efficacy requirements. If successful, the study will be expanded to thousands here to satisfy tough FDA requirements. Many women aren't waiting for the results, and physicians at several hospital based sexual dysfunction clinics in Manhattan say they've been bombarded with requests from women for prescriptions. Some have had husbands beg them to prescribe it for their wives. There are no regulations to stop or penalize doctors who write prescriptions for a use not specified by the manufacturer, and several Manhattan pharmacists said they've filled Viagra prescriptions written by doctors specifically for women. Others have refused to do so because of fear that they would be held liable in any malpractice action.

Although the general view is that men crave sex much more than women, many believe the reverse is more likely to be true. However, it is harder for women to initiate sex, and raping a man would be almost impossible. The alleged "lack of desire" often attributed to females, could really result from never having experienced an orgasm because they were not adequately aroused or lubricated by foreplay. Statistics suggest that it takes a woman 7 1/2 minutes to achieve orgasm, but the average man only maintains an erection for 90 seconds before ejaculating. This leaves his frustrated partner hanging from the trees, unless he, she, or both find some other strategy to satisfy her needs. Many women have suffered in silence, often "faking" an orgasm when in actuality, they really felt nothing at all. However, they may choose to beg off by complaining of headache, or lack of desire, because these excuses are much more acceptable, than having to admit that they have difficulty becoming aroused, even when it's not their fault.

One 55 year-old nurse said she couldn't decide whether her problem was lack of desire or lack of an ability to become aroused. "When you're younger, you could look at someone and all those bells and whistles would go off, but when you are with your partner for a long time, a certain boredom sets in, so maybe Viagra could be the answer to that." She is anxious to try it and believes "I think everyone wonders if it could be better."

But for some who experience sexual discomfort after the menopause or lack interest in sex, a husband on Viagra is the last thing they want. A 62 year old mother of six complained to Ann Landers that she was thrilled when her 64 year old husband began to "slow down" about two years previously. She was never crazy about sex, but heeded her mother's advice that "a woman should never refuse her husband because if he isn't taken care of at home, he will look elsewhere" Her children had given them a trip to Hawaii as a 40th wedding anniversary present the previous year. The romantic setting set him off and "We had more sex on that trip than in the previous ten years. When we got home, I needed a vacation. After that, his sex drive disappeared completely. Since Viagra, the old goat is back in the saddle again. I do love my husband, Ann, but I believe I have earned a rest. Besides, these pills cost \$10 each. Last week, he took four". In her response, the columnist noted she had received tons of mail about Viagra, and although most were favorable, there were many similar complaints. Even younger women may not appreciate it. As one 30 year old nursing student complained, "I am not a jungle gym."

The Global Impact Of Viagra

Viagra is the hottest drug in history all over the world, including countries where it's not legal. Although approved in Brazil, Mexico, Morocco and South Africa, the pill is banned in Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate Republic, whose leader boasts 8 wives and 48 children, and advised his people to eat fish instead. The drug has been available since March in San Marino, a tiny hilltop Republic inside Italy, whose population of 25,000 threatened to double because of the influx of Italian men. While they can't buy Viagra in a pharmacy, a bar in Genoa offers "*gelati viagra*", the same shade of blue ice cream, a grocer near Lake Como is peddling "*formaggio Viagra*" for pasta, an unaccountably soft cheese, and there is also a "*pizza viagra*", that is topped with hot chili peppers. (Continued on Page 7)

Not since "sputnik", has a new word entered so many languages so quickly. In Mexico, humorists say *viagra* means "the old lady is grateful," from the words *vieja* and *agradecida*. Frenzy there was so great, that when a Newspaper announced an on-line chat, over 200 people called within an hour. There is a booming black market, with men paying up to \$60 a pill in Taiwan, \$520 to \$800 in Turkey, compared to only \$500 for 30 pills in Germany. Many are counterfeit, and investigators have identified two bogus pill mills in Europe and one in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley that are going full blast. In Egypt, three men wound up in intensive care units after using *Viagra*, and authorities confiscated thousands of pills being sold illegally. A cartoon showed an elderly man laid out dead surrounded by tearful relatives. One asks "What did you say was his last word?" "*Viagra*" is the response.

It will probably not be available in Israel for months, but Rule 29C of the health code allows exceptions to be made on a "compassionate basis". Since *Viagra* was introduced, Rule 29C cases have tripled in number. The head of an impotence clinic in Jerusalem says "They don't even care if they die from it as long as the sex is good." Women who claim their husbands cannot satisfy their needs in bed call in, explaining that they want to put a pill in his food or a glass of wine. A number in a newspaper ad reaches a telephone in Brooklyn, N.Y., where you can get 10 pills for \$280, guaranteed to be delivered anywhere in Israel within 24 hours.

A Pfizer executive in Jakarta said he received a call asking for 100 *Viagra* tablets to be sent to the home of 77-year-old ex-president Suharto. He tactfully replied that as *Viagra* was not yet approved in Indonesia, the company had no supply on hand, and promised to do what he could. The next day he received a call from the same individual telling him not to bother, since "We've already got some in from the U.S." A travel agency in Japan offers *Viagra* Tours to Guam or Hawaii, where the drug can be purchased legally, for \$1,400, which includes a doctor's exam and two ten pill bottles of *Viagra*. People have been known to spend over \$8000 to fly across the Atlantic to get supplies of the drug.

While *Viagra* can promote sin, it can preserve marriages, and the Church has no official policy. The Vatican pharmacy doesn't sell the drug, but a Costa Rican Archbishop has proclaimed that if it "contributes to the healthy development of holy matrimony and is done with medical guidance, it is welcomed". Various Rabbis and Muslim clerics have also given *Viagra* their blessings, creating a conflict between Church and State in certain parts of the world.

Financial Fallouts

"Oooh, oooh, ahh, ahh, yes, yes" was the caption under a cartoon in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* which showed an elderly couple who were obviously very pleased and happy. However, as the next frame explained, it was not because *Viagra* had increased their sex life, but rather their investment portfolio. In the past year Pfizer's stock more than doubled to an all time high, requiring a two for one split. Industry analysts say that annual sales could top \$4 billion in a few years, although new drugs in the pipeline could very well eat into that.

Viagra has boosted business for pharmacists and physicians, and one urologist who developed writer's cramp from issuing several hundred prescriptions in a few days, finally resorted to a rubber stamp. Business is booming in brothels in Carson City Nevada, where prostitution is legal, with an increase of over 20 percent since April. According to the owner of Miss Kitty's Fantasy Ranch, "There have been some guys in here who look about 80. They come in with their canes. But the girls don't care if their customers are 18 or 100 years old." The proprietor of the Cherry Patch says he could make a fortune if he could sell *Viagra* and advertise it.

Dr. Jim Coone, who owns the Family Walk-In Clinic in a Georgia strip mall prescribes *Viagra* to dozens of men who literally do walk in off the street and ask for it, after a \$55 cursory history and physical. In Manhattan, a clinic has a man pacing the streets during rush hour wearing a three-foot-tall sandwich board that blares "Are You A Candidate For VIAGRA" with a phone number. The co-owner, who previously owned an ice creams shop and car dealership, explains that "A lot of men refuse to approach their primary physicians for this situation, but they come to us". He wears a white medical coat in the office, but has a real doctor to write prescriptions. A weekly newspaper carries ads from a clinic that dispenses *Viagra* for "premature reaction" and "orgasm failure", and a "Viagra Consultation Service" run by a physician without an office who visits patients in their homes or at work. He also advertises on the Web, along with www.thepillbox.com and www.focus.com, a Las Vegas clinic offering an "online consultation" that will set you back \$85.00, even if you don't buy them for ten bucks each. Canadians have made *Viagra* Vermont's number one export, and New York now has *Viagra* Falls.

How It Works, Complications, Current Warnings, And Future Therapies

Sildenafil citrate (Viagra) was originally investigated as a drug to lower blood pressure, and researchers were surprised to find that it was much better at raising erections. Clinical trials showed that it was effective in three out of four patients with erectile failure, the preferred term for impotence, because it blocks an enzyme that prevents the penis from becoming engorged with blood. Side effects of headache, facial flushing, nasal congestion, and a temporary bluish tinge to vision were minimal. It was found to be compatible with a variety of popular medications, but because of its possible ability to dangerously decrease blood pressure in patients taking pills containing nitroglycerin, a separate trial was done that confirmed this. Pfizer has issued a strict warning about this interaction, but there may be others that have not yet been uncovered. Researchers do not know if the drug causes any permanent changes in vision, and patients with retinal problems such as macular degeneration are urged to stay at the lowest dose possible. There may also be an interaction with protease inhibitors that increase plasma concentrations of Viagra, and HIV-positive men should also start on a 25 mg dose.

FDA approval does not guarantee a drug's safety, and although Viagra was exonerated in the 16 deaths recently reported, several patients were taking other drugs like Hytrin, which is used to treat hypertension and prostate enlargement. Posicor, a highly touted hypertension drug has now been withdrawn just 10 months after it became available here. It had also been found to be safe with other common medications, and only after it was taken by 400,000 people was it apparent that it could cause dangerous interactions with over two dozen widely used drugs, including Viagra. Seldane, a popular antihistamine, was also recently banned for similar reasons, but it took twelve years to recognize its dangers! The biggest hazard is that 60 percent of impotent patients have significant cardiovascular disease, and some may be unaware of this, or the increased risk of death associated with sexual activity. Adrenaline levels triple, pulse rate jumps from 80 to 150, and blood pressure shoots up to 200, all of which favors clot formation leading to a stroke or heart attack, or a weakened vessel in the brain to burst. For a 50 year old man with heart disease, the chances of having a heart attack in the hour he has sex are 30 in a million, compared to 10 in a million at other times. Even if you add complications like stroke or sudden death to an arrhythmia, the odds only go up to 90 in a million, which many would be willing to risk. However, they are much higher in those who don't exercise regularly, where the possibility of complications jumps to three in one thousand, triple the risk for cardiac catheterization. Pfizer is very concerned about this, since most of the deaths have been in patients with heart disease. It is spending millions of dollars for eight-page glossy ads in leading medical journals featuring three older couples dancing, to emphasize the dangers of resuming sexual activity for patients with cardiovascular problems, and that erectile dysfunction affects both partners.

Other effective treatments are on the horizon. Vasomax, (phentolamine) and apomorphine, which is placed under the tongue, don't react with nitroglycerin. Researchers are also excited about topical creams containing vasodilators that produce prompt, firm erections in 90 percent of men without serious organic disease and increase libido in both sexes. Contrary to popular opinion, Viagra does not increase sexual desire or a normal erection, but new approaches can, so stay tuned for a future feature on this and other exciting developments.

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Editor-in-Chief

ISSN # 1089-148X

HEALTH AND STRESS

*The Newsletter of
The American Institute of Stress*

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