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Men most at risk of osteoporosis least aware of its threat

The level of awareness among Australian men who are most at risk of osteoporosis is 'deeply concerning' according to a leading expert in bone health.

Professor Peter Ebeling, Medical Director of Osteoporosis Australia and Head, Department of Medicine in the School of Clinical Sciences, Monash University, at Monash Health said the focus on men on World Osteoporosis Day was appropriate.

"A recent survey from Osteoporosis Australia showed alarming numbers of young men thought osteoporosis was rare in men – about 40% of 18- 24 year olds. But more worrying is the number of men 65 and over who had the same view – almost a fifth (19%).

"It's a worry that young men aren't aware there is a risk, because it's in those younger years they can work to lower their risk of developing the bone disease later in life. But if the target audience for information about osteoporosis isn't aware of their risks, that is an even greater problem.

The survey showed increasing levels of awareness about osteoporosis through the age groups, until a drop off at the 65 plus age group.

"The 65 plus group were slightly more likely to think they would not get osteoporosis as the survey average – 59% of those asked did not think they were at risk of getting it. By comparison only 55% of 35-44 year olds held the same view.

An international survey of adults in 12 countries found more startling results. The International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF) showed 90% of all adults were unaware of how common fractures are in men, whereas international data show one in five men over the age of 50 years are likely to be affected by a break.

The survey also showed up gaps in how bone health is managed by doctors. More than 50% of men over 50 years old said they had never had any form of bone assessment during a check up – including being asked about bone health, discussing risk factors for osteoporosis, queries about broken bones or referral for a bone mineral density test.

Professor Ebeling says this either points to poor communication by health professionals to patients at risk of developing the illness, or the general lack of awareness about bone health in Australia.

"Bones aren't very sexy. It's hard to get the media's attention in the same way as heart disease and diabetes, which have dominated the headlines, despite the prevalence of the illness. In Australia, someone will be admitted to hospital with an osteoporotic fracture about every three minutes.

"If you think about it, without your bones you aren't going anywhere! And it's no help to the health budget with costs of managing fractures caused by osteoporosis estimated to be \$33.6 billion over the next decade. Something needs to be done now." He said.

World Osteoporosis Day: 20 October 2014
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