

Abstract

There are nearly 240million men in the expanded European Union, with a life expectancy that ranges from 65.5 in Latvia to 78.4 years in Sweden. If you look at the whole of the European Region there are 425million men with a life expectancy ranging from 59 years in the Russian Federation to 79 years in Iceland, an incredible 20 years difference in the average age of death. Moreover, in every country, male life expectancy lags well behind female for reasons that are not simply biological. Men die prematurely because they take too many risks with their health, they do not access services effectively and the services themselves have largely failed to engage with men.

One of the great tragic secrets of the last 100 years has been men's poor health; with the economic and social cost of a man dying prematurely going far beyond the grief of the family, with industry and the broader community also paying the price of their early demise. If you add into the mix that it is usually the most socially disadvantaged communities that see the greatest loss of their men folk that the problems become compounded.

If we accept that there is a problem with the health of a lot of men then the question must move to what should be done about it.

This inaugural lecture will describe the activity that has been undertaken in getting the problems of men's health recognised at national and European levels, including the thorny debate about the relationship between voluntary organisations and the pharmaceutical industry, and then giving a vision of where we need to be going over the next ten years to move the agenda on into its next phase.

This will explore how working with large employers of men such as PostEurop, working with organisations that have a close affinity to men such as UEFA, and retaining pressure on both the professional bodies and government at all levels has to be at the forefront of our activity. But this has to be linked to informing the 'man on the street' about their health so he too can act to improve his chances. To improve men's health throughout Europe, it is necessary to develop 'gender sensitive' health policy and practice that meets the needs of men as well as women.