

Media release: Research shows misconceptions about heart procedures could be deadly

Even the scare of major heart procedures isn't enough for people to change their lifestyle for the better according to a study by the University of Western Sydney.

Ms Ritin Fernandez, from the UWS School of Nursing and South Western Sydney Centre for Applied Nursing Research, says the findings of her study show that the majority of patients one to two years after heart procedures still had multiple risk factors for heart disease which they could easily control or eliminate through a lifestyle change.

"Almost 60 per cent of patients had at least two 'modifiable' risk factors such as being over weight, physically inactive, high blood pressure or high cholesterol," says Ms Fernandez, who conducted the study as part of her PhD.

A non-heart friendly diet and a lack of exercise are major causes of heart disease - however the study found few patients appeared willing or able to make changes for the better.

"The study indicates a lack of information and a misunderstanding that technological procedures have 'cured' them. This may be responsible for patients not modifying their lifestyle," says Ms Fernandez.

"For patients who do not change their behaviour, their cardiovascular system may develop further disease."

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the leading cardiovascular cause of death worldwide. In Australia, it claimed 26,000 lives in 2003 which is almost 20 per cent of all deaths.

The UWS research centred on questionnaire responses from 202 patients aged between 35 and 87 years who underwent coronary angioplasty to reopen blocked arteries that supply blood to the heart.

In 2001 almost 24,000 angioplasty procedures were performed in Australia.

Ms Fernandez says modern techniques to open blocked coronary arteries means many patients stay in hospital for two days - making it appear to the patient that the procedure is simple, routine and not serious. However according to Ms Fernandez this is a deadly misconception.

"Some patients have angioplasty after a heart attack, but for others the procedure is performed to relieve chest pain. They're unaware of the seriousness of their condition.

"We found thirty per cent of patients undergoing heart surgery didn't even realise they had heart disease. Many respondents in the survey also mistakenly believed the surgery had cured them," says Ms Fernandez, who used to work in a hospital coronary care unit.

"Advanced surgical techniques and medication can only go so far repairing the damage and reducing the impact of heart disease.

"The most effective, long term treatment is a well informed and motivated patient who is willing to change their lifestyle to

eliminate their risk factors and save their own lives," says Ms Fernandez.

The insights revealed in this study will be used in future projects to develop better communication and behavioural strategies to help improve the prognosis for people with coronary heart disease. Ends

Background Information: What is coronary angioplasty? Coronary angioplasty is a surgical procedure to unblock or widen narrow arteries.

A tiny balloon is temporarily inserted via a small incision, usually in the groin, and manoeuvred to the blockage where the balloon is inflated to widen the artery. Small mesh tubes, called stents, can also be inserted into the damaged artery to permanently hold it open.

The procedure can reduce cardiovascular disease symptoms such as shortness of breath and chest pains. It can also be used during a heart attack to quickly open an artery and reduce damage.

For details, contact:  
Senior Media Officer  
Paul Grocott

Tel: 02 9678 7083, 0406 429 304  
Email: [p.grocott@uws.edu.au](mailto:p.grocott@uws.edu.au)

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