

Women and Cardiovascular Health conference to highlight need for gender-specific research

ESC PRESS RELEASE

Topics:

Cardiovascular Disease Prevention - Risk Assessment and Management

Date :

29 Oct 2009

The 'Red Alert for Women's Hearts' conference, taking place on 5 November 2009, at the European Heart House, Sophia Antipolis, France, will address the subject of Women and Cardiovascular Disease (CVD). The conference is jointly organised by the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and European Heart Network (EHN), as part of Work Package 6 of the [EuroHeart project](#) (1).

Heart disease and [stroke](#) are the leading causes of death for women worldwide, killing more than 8.6 million, more than the total number who die from cancer, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria combined.

However, the risk for women is largely under-estimated, by both the general population and often by the medical profession itself. This is due to the fact that women usually suffer from CVD 10 years later in their life than men: the risk increases after menopause, partly because of ovarian hormone deficiency that favours [hypertension](#), [diabetes](#), [hyperlipidemia](#), central obesity and the [metabolic syndrome](#).

In the report that will be presented at the conference (2), Professor Stramba Badiale, MD, PhD at the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, IRCCS Istituto Auxologico Italiano, finds that women are underrepresented in cardiovascular research in Europe. "In the 62 randomized clinical trials published between 2006 and July 2009, only 33.5% of enrolled participants were women," he says.

This underrepresentation is particularly noticeable in the fields of cholesterol-lowering therapy, [ischaemic heart disease](#) and [heart failure](#).

Professor Roberto Ferrari, President of the ESC says: "With regard to cardiovascular health, we do lack data for women simply because the majority of clinical trials are conducted on men. It is important to have special clinical trials conducted only on women because their cardiovascular pathology is, at least at some point during their lives, different from that of men and it is incorrect to apply data derived from studies on men to women."

Another finding of the report that supports the conference programme is that only 50% of the clinical trials conducted in the last three years which enrolled both men and women reported the analysis of the results by gender.

Susanne Logstrup, director of the EHN, regrets that, as a result, "safety and efficacy of several drugs have been evaluated predominantly in male populations."

Professor Stramba-Badiale is hopeful that the report and the conference will encourage new practice amongst the research community, with a systematic enrolment of women in clinical trials. "New data should improve the clinical management of CVD and, in the future, develop possible gender specific diagnostic and therapeutic strategies," he says.

The research is part of the EuroHeart project, which aims at defining areas of policies and public health interventions which can contribute to prevent avoidable deaths and disability across Europe. It is led by the European Society of Cardiology, in partnership with the European Heart Network, and is co-funded by the [European Commission Public Health Programme 2003-2008](#).

The 'Red alert for women's hearts' conference will systematically review the place of women in all aspects of scientific literature, whether clinical trials, guidelines, medical curriculum or regulatory processes.

More than 60 awareness campaigns addressing the particular issue of women and cardiovascular diseases have been organised in the last 20 years in the 19 countries participating in WP 6 of the EuroHeart project. This is evidence that national Heart Foundations and Cardiac Societies have long been aware of the urgent need to promote the issue amongst the female population and health professionals. The results of campaigns showed an increased awareness that cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death for women. Despite this, gender-specific training for cardiologists is still lacking in the majority of European countries.

The objective of this conference is to create a series of recommendations for policy makers, research funding agencies and regulatory entities, at both national and EU level. Red Alert for Women's Hearts is also the opportunity to look at how countries address the lack of information of the population and of health professionals, by giving an overview of past campaigns and their impact, country by country.

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Notes to editor

1. EuroHeart involves partners in 21 countries in the EU and the EEA receives co-funding from the European Commission Public Health Programme 2003-2008.
2. Research published by the ESC and the EHN in the report: Red Alert for Women's Hearts, Women and Cardiovascular Research in Europe (November 2009).

References

The European Society of Cardiology (ESC) represents more than 62,000 cardiology professionals across Europe and the Mediterranean. Its mission is to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in Europe.

For more information, please visit the [ESC Press page](#).