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# Top Tips to Support Men to Access Primary Care Services

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The burden of ill-health experienced by men in Ireland is considerable. As the recently published National Men's Health Policy highlights, male life expectancy is almost five years lower than female life expectancy, and men in Ireland have higher death rates for most of the leading causes of death and at all ages.



Men, however, access health services less frequently than women do, and this is consistent across age, ethnic and socio-economic groups. Many factors influence men's help-seeking behaviours, including their perception of health services. The following are some evidence-based tips that your Practice may find useful to support men to promptly access your service when they need to:

## ***1. Adopt a patient-centred and partnership approach to health care***

Research has shown that men express a strong preference for a patient-centred and partnership approach to decision-making about their health. Men are much more likely to speak openly about their health when they experience a relaxed and friendly environment, and where a GP shows empathy by listening to and understanding issues from the man's perspective. Such an approach facilitates the development of a strong, trusting and lasting relationship between the GP and the male patient.

## ***2. Adopt a concise, clear and direct style of communication***

Men prefer a concise, direct and matter-of-fact style of communication from a non-judgemental health care provider. Men welcome a clear treatment plan with regard to how a health problem can be 'fixed'. This may include referral to other health professionals. Humour, when used appropriately, can also support men to communicate in the consultation. Unlike most women, men's knowledge of issues concerning their own health tends to be poor. Therefore, sufficient time should be given in the consultation to supporting men to understand health information, medical issues and/or procedures. It may also be worthwhile to check with the man that he understands what has been communicated to him. Paperwork should also be easy to understand.

## ***3. Provide a waiting area where men feel at ease***

Many men perceive that GP waiting rooms have been designed around the needs of female patients. Consider how the overall environment of the waiting room can be made more male-friendly, and try to make available men's health leaflets, booklets and posters.

## ***4. Offer clinics in the evening***

Research shows that inconvenient surgery hours and long waiting times deter men from attending primary care services. Some employers may not be receptive to men taking time off to see their GP. The cost of attending may also be prohibitive for men, who may have to forfeit pay by taking time off work to attend. Evening surgery opening hours - that do not require patients to make appointments in advance - have been very well received by younger and middle aged men.

### **5. Promote help-seeking as a responsible and manly choice**

Many men delay seeking help in a timely fashion because they believe that 'being sick' or 'going to the doctor' somehow represents a failure or personal weakness. Therefore, as a Practice you can play a key role in challenging this perception by promoting men's health initiatives within your workplace and by portraying help-seeking as a responsible and manly choice.

If you would like more information on the above, you can download a copy of the National Men's Health Policy at [www.dohc.ie/publications/national\\_mens\\_health\\_policy.html](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/national_mens_health_policy.html) or visit [www.mhfi.org](http://www.mhfi.org)

