Men’s help-seeking and engagement with general practice

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written by International Khabar | June 25, 2025



In terms of health, men are less likely than women to visit a general practitioner (GP) regularly. For preventive check-ups, to assist with their mental health, or for early onset of illness, men avoid or defer seeing a doctor altogether.

This trend is not just a social stereotype – it’s backed by evidence and illustrated in health outcomes. Men are more probable to have advanced-stage disease, miss yearly check-ups, and underreport symptoms, especially of mental illness. The result? Untreated chances for early intervention and poorer long-term outcomes.

So why do men avoid general practice, and how might it be changed?

Common Barriers to Men's Help-Seeking

Knowledge about how the gap has occurred is the first step to further participation. The explanations below constitute the root causes:

1. **Masculinity and Confidence Expectations**

Social expectations educate the majority of men that manhood involves holding back. Asking for help, especially about emotional or sensitive health issues, is considered manifestations of weakness. Men can be discouraged from asking for help even when something doesn't feel right with them because of such attitudes.

2. **Fear or Denial**

Avoidance of serious diagnosis or not liking to "make a fuss" can lead to denial of symptoms in men. Others will convince themselves the issue will resolve itself or convince themselves it's not bad enough to see a doctor.

3. **Time and Access**

Busy work schedules, domestic responsibilities, and limitations on clinic hours make it impossible for men to prioritize appointments. Consultations with a GP can be inconvenient or not accessible for men working shifts or in rural areas.

4. **Distressing Past Experiences**

A previous experience of being rejected, judged, or taken no notice of can cause men to be hesitant to return. Others may believe that clinics are for women and have no idea where to

start.

The Impact of Avoidance

Avoiding general practice isn't bad just for an individual's personal health—it affects families, workplaces, and communities as well. Some of the most prevalent consequences of delayed care are:

- Delayed diagnosis of disease like cancer, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease
- Missed follow-ups that lead to poorly controlled chronic illness
- Mental health issues left untreated, including depression and anxiety
- Increased emergency room usage when conditions become complicated

Men's mental health, as a matter of fact, is a growing concern. Men are less likely to approach a doctor with emotional issues and more likely to turn to harmful coping techniques such as alcohol, withdrawal, or risk-taking.

Promoting Enhanced Male Access to GPs

To improve men's health outcomes, it is essential to make general practice accessible, relevant, and less daunting. Some strategies that can be adopted by health professionals and practices to promote enhanced male attendance are:

1. **Offer Flexible Appointment Times**

Morning, evening, or weekend appointment times can offer a time that is convenient for men to attend without disrupting work or family time. Online bookings and telehealth consultations also help.

2. **Focus on Preventive Health**

Enabling regular check-ups, even if there isn’t an urgent issue, makes “maintenance” health the new norm, as does servicing a car. GPs can structure their choice of words so that it promotes resilience in prevention, not weakness in worry.

3. **Create a Welcoming Atmosphere**

Small changes like welcoming signs, male-targeted health pamphlets, and a respectful but non-judgmental vocabulary during consultations can make men less anxious in the clinic.

4. **Use Direct, Direct Talk**

Direct men react to direct, purposeful instructions. Rather than provide general suggestions, provide specific action steps and follow-up deadlines.

5. **Ask About Mental Health – and Be Serious**

GPs may be able to facilitate opening the discussion around stress, sleep, mood, and emotional health. A few questions, asked in a non-judgmental tone, can follow on from there, especially if there has been a slow accumulation of trust.

6. **Involve Partners or Family Where Appropriate**

At times, participants report it is a partner who arranges the visit. GPs can include families in care planning or invite the patient to come with someone they know and trust, if this will make them feel safer.

Empowering Men to Engage with Their Health

Although health professionals and services do have an important part to play, changing help-seeking is also about changing attitudes. Men must remember that asking for help is

not weakness – it’s responsibility and strength.

A few simple messages can help make the difference:

- Don’t wait until something goes wrong before visiting the doctor
- Mental health is just as crucial as physical health
- Taking action early usually means quicker, less complicated treatment
- Looking after your health benefits your whole family

Sport clubs, workplaces, peer groups, and campaigns can also be fruitful means of spreading the messages and supporting active health culture among men.

Last Thoughts

It’s not getting men into the clinic – it’s getting them ready for the health discussion. If men are heard, listened to, and supported, they will be more inclined to make that first move, whether that’s booking an appointment at the check-up or having a word about something that’s on their mind.

For health care providers, it’s a chance to build trust and make a positive difference. For men, it’s one step closer to a healthier, longer life—appointment by appointment, especially with the support of a **General Practitioner Men’s Health** expert.