

Fewer Ontarians dying of heart disease

TORONTO, ON (May 12, 2010) – The rate of deaths related to heart disease decreased by 35 per cent in Ontario between 1994 and 2005 due to improvements in lifestyle factors and medical treatments, a new population study shows.

Results of the study, published in the May 12, 2010 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, indicate that improvements in traditional risk factors for coronary heart disease (CHD) such as cholesterol levels and blood pressure were responsible for about half of the reduction in deaths, while new medical and surgical treatments were associated with 43 per cent of the decrease.

“The primary aim of the study was to take a look at the number of CHD related deaths over the course of 11 years to see if we could identify any trends that would suggest what we are doing well to prevent and treat heart disease,” says Dr. Harindra Wijeyesundera, interventional cardiologist at the Schulich Heart Centre and lead author of the study. “Identifying the underlying factors associated with this decline is critical for planning future health policy and prioritizing strategies for prevention.”

In partnership with the Toronto Health Economics and Technology Assessment (THETA) collaborative, the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES), University of Liverpool, University of Western Ontario and Canadian Heart Research Center, Dr. Wijeyesundera and colleagues looked at data for people between the ages of 25 and 84 who were treated for CHD in Ontario between 1994 and 2005. The model they used to analyze the data allowed them to examine factors such as population size, CHD deaths, risk factors (smoking, diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol level, exercise, obesity) and changes in the use of treatments.

The researchers found that improvement in risk factors accounted for about 3,660 fewer CHD deaths over the course of the 11 years and new medical and surgical treatments accounted for about 3,280 of the total of deaths prevented or delayed.

Although reductions in smoking and inactivity each played an important role in the decline in CHD related deaths, the biggest difference came from a reduction in cholesterol levels and blood pressure - each representing about 20 per cent of overall reductions in death.

The most important change regarding new medical and surgical treatments was the number of patients taking appropriate medications.

“Although it was encouraging to see that more people are making the necessary lifestyle changes and getting the treatment they need to look after their heart health, the news is not all good.” cautions Dr. Wijeyesundera.

The study results indicate that the prevalence of diabetes and the rise in obesity has had an inverse effect on CHD related deaths. From 1994 to 2005, diabetes accounted for a six per cent increase in cardiac deaths, while obesity accounted for a two per cent increase.

“What people living with coronary heart disease should take away from this study is that they have a lot of power when it comes to managing their heart disease,” adds Dr. Wijeyesundera. “Making lifestyle changes like exercising, eating right and not smoking is equally as important as the medical treatment they receive so those factors need to be taken just as seriously.”