

Don't Blame It on Viagra

Men who used erectile-dysfunction drugs had higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases than did nonusers, both before and after the drugs were prescribed.

In the 12 years that sildenafil and its competitors have been on the market, investigators have attempted, without much success, to determine whether these drugs have influenced patterns of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Now, researchers have analyzed a huge U.S. insurance-claims database and have concluded that these drugs have had minimal effects.

Among 1.4 million men (age, >40), about 6% were prescribed erectile dysfunction (ED) drugs between 1997 and 2006. Users were older than nonusers and had more comorbid conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. In the year before they received their first ED drug prescriptions, users were more than twice as likely as nonusers to have had STDs (whether a chronic condition, such as HIV infection, or an acute condition, such as chlamydia infection). This difference persisted in the year after the first prescription, with essentially no change in overall STD rates for either group. The same pattern held for individual STDs, with the exception of chlamydia, which peaked in incidence among ED drug users right before the first prescription was issued.

Comment: This very convincing study absolves ED drugs from a role in propagating STDs — at least in this population of insured employed older men. It also illustrates nicely that a request for an ED drug is a marker for a sexually active patient, and a little counseling on STD prevention would not be amiss, delivered along with the prescription.

— [Abigail Zuger, MD](#)

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Jena AB et al. Sexually transmitted diseases among users of erectile dysfunction drugs: Analysis of claims data. *Ann Intern Med* 2010 Jul 6; 153:1.