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How your OB-GYN can help determine your risk of CVD

Who have you seen more recently, your primary care physician or your gynecologist? For many women, unless they have a specific health concern, the answer may be “gynecologist”. Fears of cervical, ovarian, and breast cancer may drive women to be more tuned into their gynecological health and more likely to keep up with yearly pelvic exams and mammograms — although the reality is that twice as many women are likely to die from cardiovascular disease than from every other cancer combined.

A team of researchers at the University of Illinois Medical Center in Peoria wondered if it might be effective to bring the OB-GYN community of doctors into the fight against women’s heart disease. The early results of the Women’s Heart Health Initiative, which began in October 2010 and is still ongoing, were presented in May at the Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions (SCAI) by lead researcher Sudhir Mungee, MD, an interventional cardiologist at HeartCare Midwest and an assistant clinical professor of medicine at the University of Illinois (Peoria); “Unfortunately, women have more heart disease than men right now,” says Dr. Mungee. “There is a lack of awareness, even among physicians.” Working under the theory that “women listen to their gynecologists”, Dr. Mungee and his colleagues created a three-part screening survey for patients to receive when visiting their OB-GYNs, which would assess a wide range of heart disease risk factors.

The first part of the survey asks routine questions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, family history, weight and body mass index. The survey then asks for symptoms, such as shoulder and neck pain and shortness of breath, while the final questions look at gynecological history, including pregnancy complications like preeclampsia and gestational diabetes, hysterectomies, and onset of menopause. “Women lose hormonal protection after menopause and hysterectomies, so their risk of heart disease increases significantly,” says Dr. Mungee.

With a goal of screening 3000 patients through the Women’s Heart Health Initiative, the project has already reached 1000 women. In analyzing the data from the first 300 respondents, researchers found that 83% had at least one risk factor for heart disease, and that nearly all the women knew their family history. However, only 28% could complete the survey, as the majority of women did not have enough information about their risk factors, including cholesterol levels and body mass index, to provide a full profile. Gynecologists who discover any risk factors in the survey then refer the patient to their primary care provider for further examination.

“We are trying to change the way we look at women and their heart health,” says Dr. Mungee, “by communicating with them where they are most likely to be. If we can get

more gynecologists to screen women for heart disease, it would be an exciting step forward for women's heart health."

Resource:

Women's Heart Health Initiative Improves Screening By Collaborating With Ob/Gyns

<http://www.scai.org/Press/detail.aspx?cid=f2e8d67b-f507-4a2e-8f94-2a15766a23ca>