MEN’S HEALTH: AN UNTAPPED OTC MARKET

Pharmacies and OTC (over-the-counter) producers and marketers have not yet paid sufficient attention to men’s health from either a public health or a commercial perspective. This report shows why and how more attention should be paid to men as a potentially significant OTC market.

Introduction
Men have shorter lives than women in virtually every country in the world and experience a higher mortality rate than women for almost every comparable major cause of death.

This cannot simply be explained by biology. Men’s poor health is now understood to be primarily caused by the way boys and men are brought up not to show concern about their own health and to take risks, how they have been largely overlooked by health improvement campaigns, and the practical barriers that impede their access to primary care services (such as restricted opening hours).

In recent years, the fatalism that has surrounded men’s health – the belief that men’s health outcomes will always be poor and that it is largely fruitless to try and change that – has begun to dissipate. There is growing evidence that men are becoming more interested in their health and that they can make better use of health services and products.

But men’s health remains a market largely untapped by pharmacy and OTC marketers. The majority of OTCs – for headaches, colds and flu, for example – are not sex-specific but the marketing is slanted towards women because they are seen as the main purchasers of OTCs. There are only a few OTCs that are exclusively for male use and with male-targeted marketing, such as hair loss products, certain micronutrient combinations, and a few treatments for prostate problems.

There is therefore a great opportunity for pharmacy and OTC marketers to maximise the commercial potential of the underserved male population and, at the same time, help to improve men’s health.

Men’s use of primary care services
Men generally access primary care services less often than women. This applies to general practice, dentistry and optometry as well as pharmacy. In the UK, for example, men visit a pharmacy four times a year on average compared to 18 times for women. Men are also less likely to take part in screening programmes, such as for bowel cancer.

This poorer use of services is in part due to the nature of masculinity, which requires men to appear tough and not to ask for help. Men have relatively low levels of health literacy and are exposed to less
health information (the male-targeted media places more emphasis on fitness than health). They have less awareness of symptoms which can also contribute to later diagnosis and worse outcomes.

Men’s lack of familiarity with services is a factor – women, unlike men, tend to routinely use them from their teens and 20s for sexual and reproductive health issues – and men are also deterred by practical barriers, including opening times for some services (men are more likely than women to be in full-time work) and difficult-to-use appointment booking systems.

The ‘feminised’ ambience of many services is an additional barrier for some. Many men feel uncomfortable in pharmacies in particular because the majority of displays and products are aimed at women. There is a vicious circle at work here: marketers and retailers target women because men do not go into pharmacies while men do not go into pharmacies because they believe there is nothing there for them.

**Positive trends in men’s health**

In the last 20 years, men’s health has attracted more interest from NGOs, governments, health providers and the pharmaceutical industry.

National men’s health NGOs now exist in at least nine countries and there are two over-arching organisations, the European Men’s Health Forum (EMHF) and Global Action on Men’s Health. There are also NGOs in several countries that focus on specific men’s health issues, such as prostate cancer or men’s mental health. Movember now operates in 21 countries to raise funds for work on prostate cancer and men’s mental health.

Three governments – Ireland, Brazil and Australia – have adopted national men’s health policies. There are also several research centres in different countries with a multi-disciplinary interest in men’s health and several non-clinical academic journals with a specific men’s health focus.

There is growing research evidence that men are interested in health if it is presented in the right way. Professional sport, especially soccer and rugby, has successfully helped to deliver health improvement programmes and primary healthcare services to men.

*Men’s Health* magazine is now published in almost 50 countries with an estimated readership of over 24 million men. Men’s Health Week, which takes place each June in many parts of the world, encourages men to look after their health and wellbeing and to seek help from services when necessary.

Grooming products for men are a fast-growing commercial business. This trend is fuelled by an increasing media focus on the ‘ideal’ male body, the rise in the incidence of relationship breakdown and growing job insecurity (more men now want to ‘look good’ for potential new partners and to help them outshine their competitors for jobs). The greater acceptability of gay culture makes it easier for men to behave in ways previously considered by many to be ‘unmanly’ and the increasing involvement of men with childcare is helping to change men’s sense of their role as men and brings them more into contact with primary healthcare services.

As men become more comfortable discussing their health and more interested in self-care and personal grooming, they are increasingly likely to engage with primary healthcare services, including pharmacy.

**The role of pharmacy in men’s health**

Pharmacy offers many practical advantages for male customers:

- No appointment is necessary
- Convenient opening times
- Accessible locations
- Private consultation areas often available
- Anonymity

Yet men generally use pharmacies much less often than women and do not ask for advice, have a lower awareness of the services provided, and have negative views of pharmacists themselves (sometimes even seeing them as ‘failed doctors’). Men also tend to see pharmacies as ‘female spaces’, not least because of the often extensive displays of female grooming products.
A number of important developments in pharmacy are creating an opportunity to change this:

- The growth in the male grooming market.
- The increasing over-the-counter availability of male-focused medicines that used to be prescription-only (e.g. for erectile dysfunction and benign prostatic hyperplasia).
- The growing role of pharmacies in providing lifestyle advice.
- The introduction of health checks in pharmacies and the provision of other services (e.g. flu vaccination) previously available only in the GP surgery.
- New health technologies – such as wearable-devices that track sleep, exercise, pulse, and other metrics – are likely to be particularly popular with men and pharmacists can sell these and also position themselves to advise on the data outputs and recommend OTCs and other products that may be needed.
- The development of screening and advice via kiosks located within pharmacies.
- The realisation by governments and health service policymakers that, for minor conditions, it can be more cost-effective for pharmacists rather than GPs or accident and emergency services to be the initial point of contact between the public and the health service.
- The increasing evidence that more men will use pharmacy services if they feel the services are relevant to them.

But to increase male footfall, men’s health must be more visibly present in pharmacies. The following would help achieve this:

- Male-targeted health information, such as leaflets, routinely available in pharmacies.
- Male-specific products given a higher profile in in-store and window displays.
- Marketing for non-sex specific products aimed at men as well as women.
- Pharmacy staff provided with more training in men’s health and communicating effectively with men.
- Improved digital access to pharmacy services – this could also help to reduce the growing demand for counterfeit drugs purchased online.
- A link with a men’s health charity for certain brands or product ranges to help strengthen the perception that the pharmacy is a place for men.
- More consumer research into men’s use of pharmacies and what further changes are required.

There are several groups of men with potential for specific targeting:

- Older men – as the population ages, this group will require increasing support with the management of chronic conditions.
- Young men – they are placing higher value on exercise, nutrition, not smoking and managing stress but are not yet translating this into changed behaviours.
- Men living alone – as the proportion of single men increases, there are more men who cannot rely on women to take care of their health needs.
- Men who are fathers – becoming a father is a key turning point in many men’s lives and fathers are more likely to take care of their own health as well as use primary healthcare services for their children.

There are already several examples of marketing for OTC medicines that targets men specifically. Lamisil’s ‘Crotch Confidence’ campaign, for example, highlighted the product’s role in treating jock itch in men; Oxy, which treats acne, has packaging in the UK that states it is ‘engineered for male skin’ and in Australia it was promoted with a viral video showing men popping ‘man-sized’ spots; in the USA, male-dominated sports are used in the marketing of Prilosec (for heartburn); and Voltaren (a topical analgesic) is targeted at men with advertising that highlights its role in treating sports injuries. Several vitamin and mineral products, as well as hair loss treatments, are also aimed at a male audience. But, overall, the proportion of products marketed to men is small compared to the potential size of the market.
EMHF Mini Manuals

EMHF has produced a number of concise, male-targeted guides to different health problems, including prostate and eye health. This type of guide is well-suited to display in pharmacies and can create opportunities for conversations between male service users and pharmacy staff.

About EMHF

The European Men’s Health Forum (EMHF) was established in 2001 and is an autonomous, non-profit-making, non-governmental organisation based in Brussels.

EMHF is the only European organisation dedicated to the improvement of men’s health in all its aspects. Its vision is a future in which all men in Europe have an equal opportunity to attain the highest possible level of health and well-being.

Its mission is to improve men’s health across all countries in Europe by promoting collaboration between interested organisations and individuals on the development and application of health-related policies, research, education and prevention programmes.

EMHF is committed to gender equality, fully supports activities to improve women’s health, and opposes the re-allocation of funding from women’s to men’s health.

www.emhf.org

This report is a summary of one with the same name published in 2014 by Nicholas Hall and Company with the support of EMHF. Details of the full report can be found at: www.nicholashall.com/nicholas-hall-reports/reports.