INCONTINENCE SUFFERERS COULD BE MISSING VITAL SIGNS OF ILLNESS OUT OF EMBARRASSMENT

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More than three million people in the UK could be ignoring the symptoms of serious health conditions because they're too embarrassed to talk about their issues, according to new research.

Some 50% of incontinence sufferers said they had never sought any medical support for the condition, with one third (29%) saying they had never told anyone about their condition, and more than 40% not even confiding in their family, according to new research from leading healthcare provider Benenden Health.

Although for most sufferers it is an isolated condition, incontinence can sometimes be a symptom of bigger health issues including cancer, dementia and Parkinson's, which can go undetected if sufferers fail to seek treatment. Benenden Health is urging people not to suffer in silence and see their Doctor to ensure they are getting the help they need, whilst also helping to break the taboo of talking about the subject.

With estimates that around seven million people in the UK have some degree of urinary incontinence alone, this means more than three million people living with the condition could be missing vital diagnoses out of embarrassment or GP waiting times.

The survey of 1,000 incontinence sufferers in the UK also revealed that 42% don't know the cause of their problem, with many suffering in silence rather than addressing the issue with appropriate treatment. More than half of those who haven't sought medical advice avoided doing so due to embarrassment, with one in ten saying they'd failed to due to long GP waiting times.

Incontinence is the inability to control your bladder or bowel, so you accidentally lose urine from the bladder (urinary incontinence) or faeces from the bowel (bowel incontinence). Causes can include weak pelvic floor or bowel muscles, nerve changes and enlarged prostates for men.

Symptoms can include anything from leaking whilst coughing, sneezing, laughing or exercising, being unable to control wind and wetting the bed. Some 43% of sufferers said it affects their mental health, and one in four (25%) revealed it has caused them agoraphobia where they avoid situations and experiences that risk leaks and accidents.

Ken Mastris, a 72-year-old Benenden Health member from East London, started suffering with incontinence issues after being diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2005. Ken said: "I never suffered with any symptoms but went to get a full medical check before I retired for peace of mind. After tests, my GP told me I had cancer and I had to have my prostate removed.

"You have to anticipate when you'll need to go, where the loos are and what facilities places have for disposing of pads. It's embarrassing and affects everything. Even at the airport going on holiday, I have to think twice before lifting up a heavy case, and you always have to think about having pads on you. I can't stress enough that if there's anything you're worried about, go and see your GP. If I hadn't, it could have been a very different story."

Janet Chaseley, a Specialist Nurse on the Continence Care Team at Benenden Hospital, said:
“Urinary incontinence is a common problem that can affect women and men of any age and can severely impact on their quality of life - yet can often be easily managed and treated. Don’t feel embarrassed about talking to your GP, as this is the first step to actively managing your symptoms.”

Benenden Health has more than 815,000 members across the UK and provides a range of services, including a GP 24/7 and private prescription service and Mental Health helpline. For more information on the symptoms and issues around incontinence, including guidance and support on what to do if you suffer from the condition, visit https://www.benenden.co.uk/be-healthy/body/what-is-incontinence

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Note to Editors

Survey carried out on 1,001 UK incontinence sufferers by Censuswide in August 2019.

Benenden Health is a not-for-profit organisation, founded in 1905 with the purpose of people joining together to help pay for medical care. It is one of the UK’s longest serving and most respected mutual healthcare societies, offering an affordable alternative to health insurance to more than 815,000 members.

Many UK businesses have also chosen to offer Benenden Health membership as part of their employee benefits package, with the organisation named as the UK’s most trusted provider of corporate healthcare by Moneywise in 2019.

Further data from the survey is available on request and includes:
• Sufferers have tried to manage the condition with pelvic floor exercises (41% of sufferers), reducing caffeine intake (22%) and improving diet and bowel training (20%)
• 23% of those affected are men – roughly 1.6million people in the UK
• 50% of sufferers said the condition affects their social life
• We also have regional breakdowns available

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