

## Public Health: WTO says elderly at increasing risk of undiagnosed STDs including AIDS

The World Health Organisation says that erectile dysfunction drugs are increasing the active sex life of the elderly and sexually transmitted diseases are an increasing consequence. However, the medical profession has not caught up....

The reason, the WTO says, is that those over 50 are not, in the absence of specific information, regarded as a high-risk group for such diseases.

Ivo Brito, a technical adviser for the Brazilian programme for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and AIDS at the Ministry of Health says "Many people do not think the elderly are sexually active; they regard AIDS as a disease of young people."

But it is not only those who are sexually active, or those who have unfaithful spouses, that are at risk. The WTO reports the case of Beatriz Pacheco, a Brazilian lawyer who was diagnosed as suffering from HIV in 1997. She had been infected by a cruel twist of fate: her second husband was given many blood transfusions to try to treat hepatitis. One lot of blood was contaminated.

The WTO says that there are other reasons: as the population of widows and widowers increases, they inevitably have sexual relations. But, the report says, many older people are simply not aware of the extent of the risk.

Pfizer says that there is no evidence that Viagra is a contributory factor to the growth of AIDS in the older population. In fact, their Brazilian medical director Dr João Fittipaldi says that such drugs may have a positive effect - the longer the erection remains firm, the less chance of a condom falling off, he says.

But the WTO spells it out: Dr George Schmid, a medical officer at the World Health Organisation, says: "Because of erectile dysfunction drugs, men, who would normally decrease or cease sexual activity as they age, have extended their sex lives." But more: the danger may be compounded by older men seeking out younger, sexually active women, which increases their chances of exposure to HIV. "[Erectile dysfunction] drugs can also be used for partying," says

Schmid, citing another cause for concern: that anti-impotence drugs may lead to sexual activity in unsafe conditions.

Meanwhile, the WTO has a simple message: don't assume that just because someone is over 50, they don't have sex.

That'll please those at the grab-a-granny night in the discos in Sarfend and the Costa del Sol where the blue-rinse brigade dance in long lines to The Chicken Dance.