

## **Young men turning Viagra into lifestyle drug**

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Out of the way, Bob Dole. The youth cult is moving in on Viagra.

The sagging, octogenarian one-time presidential candidate was the first public figure to endorse the wondrous ability of Viagra to produce erections where none had stood for years. Now, the drug is being promoted by ever younger subjects, who click their heels and beam with glee on television.

The drive is paying off. A study released yesterday by a U.S. firm that manages corporate drug plans found that more and more young men are turning to Viagra for comfort in their time of need.

Purchases by men from 18 to 45 have skyrocketed more than three times since Viagra first came on the market in 1998, the largest increase for any age group.

Donald Blair, a board member of the Toronto Men's Health Network, tried his first Viagra pill when he was 20. It was a wow.

"I thought I was going to die [with pleasure]. It was so potent."

"When I was dating my girlfriend, it was so cool taking it," Mr. Blair, now 23, enthused yesterday.

But the increased use of Viagra by younger men dismays many urologists who believe its original purpose -- curing permanent erectile dysfunction -- has been forgotten.

Instead, they say, the drug has become a byproduct of the rising emphasis on a man's sexual performance in new relationships, spawned by such television shows as *Sex and the City*.

"Believe me, it is very rare to see somebody under the age of 40 who really has a problem," said prominent urologist Alvaro Morales of Queen's University in Kingston.

"Yes, if someone wants to last longer or perhaps have a second go, Viagra may be helpful, but that's a very silly reason to take it."

The study by Scripts Express, published in the *Journal of Impotence Research*, tracked millions of U.S. Viagra users from 1998 to 2002.

While men aged 56 and older remain the biggest users, Viagra sales among the 18-to-45 age group went up 312 per cent during the five years.

Use of the renowned erection enhancer by men between 46 and 55 rose 212 per cent.

Study author Tom Delate, a pharmaceutical researcher, noted that use of Viagra as a medical remedy declined in all age groups.

"There is much more recreation and enhancement use," Mr. Delate said in an interview. "Viagra is becoming a lifestyle drug."

Gerald Brock, associate professor of urology at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ont., said he has had clients as young as 18 asking for the drug.

"As the stigma to taking such drugs lessens, they are helping young men, who are traditionally more sexually active and more likely to have more than one partner, become more confident," Dr. Brock said. "It helps them relate to their peers."

Abraham Morgentaler of the Harvard Medical School, author of a book on Viagra, said he has reservations about what is happening. "I do worry about people thinking they need to take a pill in order to feel adequate."

But he is also sympathetic toward men, however young, who worry they may not perform.

"It's really tough for a lot of men. There's a major emphasis in this society on the ability to perform sexually," Dr. Morgentaler said.

"So it's understandable, given our emphasis on sexuality and the *Sex and the City* syndrome, that women are becoming more aware of what's good and what's not so good. Men feel pressured in a way they've never felt before."

Mr. Blair, the young Viagra user, said he was prescribed the drug for physical and psychological reasons, not simply to have better sexual romps.

In fact, he waited four months to fill the prescription, "because I didn't like the idea of having to use drugs to help me perform in the bedroom.

"My friends have this misconception that Viagra will make them better in bed, but it should be for correcting problems that already exist," he said.

Mr. Blair, however, has stopped using the potent drug since he broke up with his girlfriend.

Not only that, the last time he used Viagra -- last January with a new partner -- it didn't work.

"I feel like, over time, I've become immune to it. I've talked to a lot of experts and they think that I should try new drugs instead."