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PROF IN WARNING TO CITY'S 'WALKING TIMEBOMBS'

Nearly 35,000 living with undiagnosed high blood pressure in Coventry

By Warren Manger
HEALTH REPORTER

MORE than 34,500 "walking time-bombs" are living with undiagnosed high blood pressure in Coventry, health experts have warned.

That means one tenth of the city is at greater risk from the UK's biggest killer – coronary heart disease.

Francesco Cappuccio, professor of cardiovascular medicine at Warwick Medical School, said it was worrying so many people could have undiagnosed high blood pressure.

"These people are walking time-bombs, it is a dreadful situation for them to be in," he said.

Warwick Medical School is an international centre of excellence for blood pressure with its advice sought by organisations worldwide.

However, Prof Cappuccio warned it needed to work with health chiefs closer to home to improve the situation in Coventry.

High blood pressure is easy to test for and control through a variety of lifestyle changes and therapies.

But it is hard to spot via symptoms, although headaches and blurred vision can sometimes be a sign.

Prof Cappuccio said blood pressure generally rose with age but people could suffer hypertension in their early 20s or 30s. As a result young doctors at Warwick Medical School are offering students free blood pressure checks as part of blood pressure awareness week.

"I would advise people to be proactive and get their blood pressure checked," said Prof Cappuccio. "People should not be scared of being told they have high blood pressure, but it can be very dangerous if it is left undiagnosed."

Doctors are encouraged to find and help patients with high blood pressure and other long term health problems through the national Quality and Outcomes Framework.

Yet Coventry has among the lowest QOF scores in the country, ranking

149th out of 152 local authorities.

Coun Joe Clifford, cabinet member for health at Coventry City Council, said it showed many patients thought they were getting a better service from their doctor than they actually were and he hoped the scores would force poor practices to improve.

The council's health scrutiny board is also concerned by Coventry's ranking with its chair, Coun David Welsh, calling for more details.

Alison Walshe, director of commission development at NHS Coventry, said the health trust was aware some GP practices had very low QOF scores, which dragged the city's average down.

NHS Coventry also offers extra rewards and support to GPs for assessing high risk patients for diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. As a result the trust hopes to see the city's ranking improve when new QOF scores are published later this year.

