

More men seeking Viagra

As of today, the popularity of Viagra has reached high levels. The blue pill is so famous worldwide that it has become a subject of numerous anecdotes and stories. **Gillian Nantume** explores how it works and its popularity in Uganda.

This month, Viagra made 20 years on the international health market. Viagra, medically known by its generic name - sildenafil citrate - was initially made by a drug company, Pfizer, to help lower blood pressure. However, since it hit the market in 1998, Viagra has enabled men to be sexually active well into their 70s and 80s.

For men who suffer from erectile dysfunction, the drug soothes the muscles of the penis, allowing it to relax so that it can be filled with enough blood to sustain an erection. However, Viagra can only help if the man is already sexually stimulated.

Because the drug is not talked about in Uganda, the 20 years almost went unmarked even though male sexual prowess or a lack of it is very much in our faces nowadays, if the media adverts of herbalists are anything to go by. Samuel Wasswa Mukibi, a 50-year-old teacher is surprised when asked for his view about the drug that increases male virility. "Do people really use that 'thing'," he asks, adding that he does not know of any man in his circles who has ever used it.

Mukibi's surprise is understandable, though, because erectile dysfunction is a very private matter. "For sure, sex is very important to men because if being weak in bed can compromise your integrity," he says, continuing, "How can you appear weak, anyway? As a man, you are supposed to have capacity."

Men with low libido

Basically, Viagra was supposed to be a miracle drug for older men, spicing up their sexual life. However, even younger men use the drug.

Sheila Tusiime, a pharmacist with Choice Pharmacy in Bunga, displays an entire shelf stocked with different brands

of Viagra. "These are generic brands, and the cheapest is sold at Shs1,500 per tablet. Each box contains four tablets. When it comes to the real Viagra, one tablet costs Shs60,000. Our customers are men of all ages and the drug is one of the fastest moving product we have." In fact, such is the profitability of Viagra that Tusiime attests to selling 300 packets in a month, on average.

John Bugembe, a driver at a hotel in the vicinity of the pharmacy, says every week, he has to run errands to pharmacies, buying Viagra for clients. "Most of the clients who send me are elderly and on the nights I have to buy Viagra for them, they have brought younger girls into their rooms. However, I have a particular client who is a young man, though terribly overweight. While the others send me to buy one tablet, he always wants two tablets. Each of them costs Shs15,000."

Over the counter drug

Because inadequacies in sexual potency are truly a private matter, most men who buy Viagra do so without prescription.

"Can a pharmacist prescribe how one should have sex?" Mukibi asks, adding, "This is something you cannot discuss with anyone; you just go online and re-

1,500

ON AVERAGE, EACH VIAGRA
TABLET COSTS THIS MUCH IN
SHILLINGS



search about how to take the drug and then, buy it."

Tusiime says most of her customers know the kind of Viagra they are looking for. "They self-prescribe. So, I really cannot begin to advise them to take one tablet once a day. They always say they know how to take it. For the few who ask, I always tell them to swallow one tablet 30 minutes before they have sex."

Other potency drugs

At Shs60,000 per tablet, the genuine Viagra is very expensive for the average Ugandan. This has given rise to different versions of male potency drugs.

Hajara Namale, a pharmacist with Nickel Pharmacy, says, "These drugs include Kamagra and Penegra and each box has four tablets, which range from 50mg to 100mg. A box is sold at Shs15,000 and in a week I get about 10 customers."

For those who can afford it, Viagra is the miracle that it is touted out to be. For those who are hard up, though, herbal remedies to erectile dysfunction are the way to go.

Can it become an addiction?

According to medicineoption.com, an online portal, some men are afraid of taking Viagra because they think they can get addicted. But this is just a myth.

"It is proved that Viagra for men is not addictive and if you have taken Viagra for some time in order to overcome psychological reasons of erectile dysfunction, it does not mean you will not be able to have sex without it in future. Also, Viagra does not have any impact on sexual desire," the site states.