

OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA AND ITS SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Summary

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a common and underestimated sleep disorder of breathing affecting about 4% and 2% of middle-aged males and females respectively and its prevalence increases with age.

This disease is characterized by repeated total (apnea) or partial (hypopnea) closure of upper airways when asleep. There are repeated sequences of events associated with hypoxemia and – often unconscious – arousals. As a consequence, the following conditions occur: disordered sleep phases and sleep architecture, excessive daytime sleepiness and fatigue, headaches, impairment of cognitive processes, touchiness and emotional see-saw or even changes in personality. One of serious consequences of OSA are cardiovascular complications, such as arterial hypertension, coronary artery disease, arrhythmia (with increased hazard of sudden death), heart failure, increased hazard of strokes. The consequences of OSA include also psychiatric and psychological

problems – depression, anxiety neurosis, sexual disorders and well as vascular dementia.

Significant effect of untreated disease on the emotional state, cognitive functions and uncontrollable daytime sleepiness result in serious social consequences for labour market, pension system, social insurance, morbidity, mortality, treatment costs, other costs and foregone earnings. Although patients are most often unconscious of their disorder, OSA affects their everyday functioning in the society through increased risk of accidents at work and traffic crashes. Studies indicate, that percentage of traffic crashes among drivers with sleep apnea is 2-7 fold higher as compared to drivers who do not suffer from that disorder.

Significant health-related impact and socioeconomic aspects of sleep disordered breathing argues for urgent need for earlier disease identification and management to reduce these consequences.