
CLINICAL TIPS

Double-check whether patient is taking Viagra

If your heart attack patient is taking erectile dysfunction medication and doesn't tell you, it could cost him his life.

"The room is full of people, and questions are being fired left and right. At times, the emphasis on Viagra is not as strong as it should be," says **Ina Helton**, RN, unit expert for the ED at UAB Hospital in Birmingham, AL.

If the patient has taken Viagra and is given nitroglycerin to treat chest pain, his blood pressure can drop very low, and this even can cause cardiac arrest, says Helton.

Many men are ashamed to admit they take the medication, and they might deny it if asked directly, she says. For that reason, you have to be very clear with the patient about the life-threatening consequences that could result from mixing nitrates and erectile dysfunction medication, Helton says. "In our ED, part of our chest pain assessment includes asking if the patient has taken Viagra in the last 24 hours," she says. "There have been a few patients who presented with chest pain with the onset during sex. For these times, questioning about taking Viagra is a little easier because they have already brought up the subject." ■