

- Heart disease in women is very likely the most misunderstood health problem in our country. For every woman who dies from breast cancer, ten will die from heart disease. While the death rate among men from coronary heart disease has been falling for the past 30 years, the number of women dying from coronary heart disease is steadily rising. By the late 1970's, more women died of heart disease than men.
- Perhaps more alarming: many physicians do not fully appreciate this silent crisis. Many doctors simply do not know that a woman having a heart attack is 50-100% more likely to die from it than a man.
- To a considerable degree, our medical system has failed to recognize female-pattern heart attack symptoms. Current testing and treatments are geared toward male physiology.
- The result is sadly predictable: women often do not recognize that they are having symptoms that require medical care. This is exacerbated by a tendency among women to be more concerned with their family's well being than their own.
- There is an urgent need for change: the need to educate women, to propel the medical community toward change—to change our assumptions, our research, our diagnosis and our treatment of women's heart disease.
- There is one facet of this story that is not surprising. The impetus to solve the problem will come from courageous and determined women. Barbra Streisand is one of these women.
- Barbra Streisand has an interesting connection between her work and her philanthropy. In the early 1990's, a highly respected cardiologist and director of the National Institutes of Health named Dr. Bernadine Healy published a study in the New England Journal of Medicine. She showed evidence of sex bias in the management of coronary heart disease, such that it was only when women had a pattern coronary heart disease that looked like a man's, were they were as likely as men to undergo life-saving treatment such as bypass surgery. Dr. Healy wrote that

"Once a woman showed that she was just like a man, by having severe coronary artery disease, then she was treated as a man would be'. As you may have guessed, Dr. Healy called this phenomenon "The Yentl Syndrome' after the story of the young heroine in the Lublin Jewish community. We have Barbra Streisand and Isaac Singer to thank for that very insightful nomenclature.

- The second woman is Dr. Noel Bairey Merz, a preeminent leader in women's cardiology in America, and director of the new Barbra Streisand Women's Cardiovascular Research and Education Program within the Women's Heart Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. Dr. Bairey Merz is an educator—among her peers and in public as a prolific lecturer and tireless advocate. She is having a radical impact on our understanding and awareness of women and heart disease, the relationship between mental stress and heart disease, the role of exercise, stress management and nutrition in reversing it. The Women's Heart Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is pursuing a broad and comprehensive investigation into understanding female pattern heart disease, including new methods for better diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery disease in women, as well as cutting research into regenerative stem cell therapies, which preliminary studies suggest may work best using female cells!

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