



Young men's health in the age of the manosphere

As the father of two young men, I am acutely aware of the challenges they face today, particularly when it comes to health and well-being. I am fortunate that both of my sons manage their health responsibly and approach life with emotional balance, despite the pressures young men face in the current social and political environment.

As physicians, we are trained to look for patterns that shape health. Increasingly, one pattern emerging in clinical encounters with young men is the influence of online culture—particularly the rise of what has been termed the “manosphere.” This loosely connected digital ecosystem spans social media platforms, podcasts, forums, and video channels, where influencers and communities present as guides for young men navigating uncertainty. While some content offers practical advice or a sense of belonging, much of its messaging promotes rigid models of masculinity that can undermine the very health men are seeking.

The health challenges facing young men today are both familiar and concerning. According to Statistics Canada, young men are less likely to access primary care, less likely to seek help for mental health concerns, and more likely to engage in risky behaviors. They experience higher rates of injury, substance use, and suicide than their female peers. While these patterns are long-standing, the social context in which young men are growing up is changing. Digital spaces now play a powerful role in shaping how young men understand masculinity and health.

Many of the young men we see are

searching for direction. They face economic uncertainty, shifting expectations around gender roles, and fewer opportunities for community and mentorship. The manosphere capitalizes on this uncertainty by offering a sense of belonging and simple prescriptions for success: pursue dominance, suppress emotion, distrust others, and prioritize status. These narratives can resonate with young men who feel overlooked.

In an era when digital voices present young men with simple yet damaging narratives about masculinity, physicians have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to offer a different message.

From a health perspective, however, these messages can be deeply problematic. In practice, they reinforce many of the barriers that prevent young men from accessing care. When emotional vulnerability is framed as weakness, young men may delay seeking help for depression or anxiety. When relationships are framed in terms of competition or control, opportunities for meaningful social connection—one of the strongest predictors of long-term health—are undermined. When masculinity is equated with toughness, it discourages the openness needed for honest conversations.

In clinical encounters, these dynamics often manifest subtly. A young man presenting with insomnia or fatigue may attribute it

to stress, avoiding discussion of underlying anxiety. Another may dismiss symptoms of depression, believing he should simply push through. Others may focus on physical optimization—exercise, supplements, or body image—while neglecting emotional well-being.

As physicians, our role is to not dismiss the motivations that draw young men to these spaces. Many are genuinely seeking discipline, purpose, and self-improvement—goals that can support positive, healthy behaviors. Physical activity, goal setting, and personal responsibility are all valuable components of well-being. The challenge is to reframe these aspirations within a healthier understanding of masculinity.

Mental health also deserves greater attention in discussions of men's health. Young men often present late in the course of psychological distress. Encouraging emotional literacy is not merely a cultural exercise; it is a preventive health strategy. When young men develop the language and confidence to talk about stress, loneliness, or uncertainty, they are more likely to seek timely support.

In an era when digital voices often present young men with simple yet damaging narratives about masculinity, physicians have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to offer a different message. The federal government is developing a national Men and Boys' Health Strategy, a welcome step that supports this by offering an opportunity to engage young men more effectively and ensure they can access the care they need. ■

—Adam Thompson, MD
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