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The UK's success in reducing deaths from heart disease has led

to a steep increase in the cost to the health service, according to new research. Scientists from Oxford University said the number of people dying each year from heart disease and strokes had fallen by 70% since 1979, but hospital admissions and drug prescriptions increased. Here's our health correspondent Robert Pigott. The dramatic reduction in the number of people dying from cardiovascular diseases in recent decades is evidence of a UK population living longer but in poorer health. People with heart disease and strokes are growing older, but they rely heavily on the health service for their survival. The prevalence of cardiovascular disease has not changed much. It ranges from just over 3% of the population in England to around 4% elsewhere in the UK. But 70% fewer people die each year from heart disease and stroke compared to 1979. Saving those lives has been costly. In one 15-year period, drug prescriptions for circulatory diseases in England increased by almost 80%. Heart and stroke patients also need expensive hospital treatment and more surgery.

Admissions in England increased by 11% in one eight year period alone. The British Heart Foundation, which commissioned the research, said despite the success in treating cardiovascular disease, what causes it is still not fully understood. What we have failed to do is to find a way of stopping the disease process which causes heart attacks and stroke in the first place, and that needs much more research. We still don't understand the fundamental biology of heart attacks and strokes sufficiently well to come up with strategies which are bound to rid us of the disease. Men might have most to gain from better research. They increasingly outnumber women in needing treatment for heart disease and strokes.