



Multidisciplinary management of hypertension

Defining the pharmacist's role on the health care team

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF PREMATURE death and disability worldwide. Of the risk factors for this disease, hypertension is the most important in absolute terms, far eclipsing smoking or hypercholesterolemia. Hypertension is not only a cardiovascular risk factor, but it may also be considered a chronic disease.

Chronic disease management techniques have recently been heralded as the solution not only to our national but also to the global health care crisis. One of the key principles of chronic disease management is the use of multidisciplinary teams. What this means is that a variety of health professionals, working together, are able to synergistically use their respective skills for the benefit of the patient. Multidisciplinary teams supply the right provider, at the right place, at the right time.

Pharmacists can be key players on the multidisciplinary health care team, particularly as applied to hypertension. We know that patients see pharmacists much more frequently than they see physicians — an average of 14 times per year versus twice per year. This gives the pharmacist an opportunity to play a key role in the management of hypertension, through:

Screening: We know that about half of those with hypertension are unaware that they have it. Thus, screening for hypertension in a pharmacy setting can be a valuable means of bringing such people to medical attention.

Control: There is a major emphasis on home and other out-of-office blood pressure monitors in the Canadian Hypertension Education Program (CHEP) guidelines. Such devices facilitate accurate diagnosis, patient adherence, and improved control of blood pressure. Phar-

macists can play an important role in helping hypertensive patients select appropriate home blood pressure monitors or in providing access to out-of-office blood pressure measurement devices.

Education: Busy physicians often have little time to discuss the use, interactions, and side effects of antihypertensive medications during an office visit. The pharmacist is an obvious source for such information. Moreover, pharmacists can provide useful information on how to most appropriately take blood pressure medication.

Dealing with physicians



- All of us get embarrassed when mistakes are brought to our attention: be diplomatic.
- Don't automatically presume that a mistake has been made; sometimes medications may be used in non-standard ways for good reason — both the pharmacist and physician can learn from one another.
- If in doubt, always err on the side of patient safety.
- When speaking with a physician, take the opportunity to introduce other services that you may provide (e.g., teaching how to use blood glucose meters, certified asthma educator onsite, etc.).
- Remember that physicians are often pressed for time, so keep calls succinct. If leaving a message to call back, a brief indication of the reason is often helpful.

Adherence: A number of pharmacy-based interventions can lead to better patient adherence to pharmacotherapy. These can include various patient reminder devices such as medication alarms or packaging innovations such as blister packs. Other techniques can remind patients to refill prescriptions.

Ensuring appropriate pharmacotherapy: The complexity of pharmacotherapy and particularly drug interactions can be daunting for the physician. A pharmacist is well situated to maintain surveillance of all a patient's prescription and non-prescription drug usage. This can allow for identification of potential drug interactions, including interactions with herbal remedies or with dietary items.

Identification of other diseases or risk factors: Hypertension is commonly associated with other diseases. The pharmacist, working as a member of the multidisciplinary health care team, can carry out the same functions as listed above

for other diseases. This ensures that a patient's care, particularly pharmacotherapy, transcends disease-specific boundaries.

As seen in this issue, pharmacists already have an opportunity to play an important role in the management of hypertension. As new care models are adopted in Canada, their role as a member of the multidisciplinary health care team will undoubtedly continue to expand. ■

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