



# Learning to be indispensable

## Helping hypertensive patients achieve their treatment goals

A LARGE NUMBER OF PATIENTS WITH HYPERTENSION DO NOT REACH the blood pressure goals recommended by the Canadian Hypertension Society. Given that many hypertensive patients visit the pharmacy on a regular basis, pharmacists can play a leading role in helping them achieve their treatment goals. With their expertise, pharmacists can become involved in managing hypertensive patients in many ways.

### Blood pressure monitoring

Many pharmacies currently offer in-store blood pressure measurement. However, in order for this service to be an effective health intervention, the pharmacist's active involvement is necessary. The service should not be used simply to increase pharmacy customers, but presents a unique opportunity for pharmacists to make a positive contribution to their patient's health. Whether the pharmacist is validating the blood pressure measurement or interpreting the results, he or she must assist patients and recommend treatment based on individual results. Measuring blood pressure in pharmacies is also an invaluable means of evaluating a treatment's effectiveness and reinforcing counselling messages to hypertensive patients. Providing this service gives the pharmacist direct access to clinical results and an opportunity to speak with patients to help them achieve their treatment goals.

As is discussed elsewhere in this issue, the Canadian Hypertension Education Program has recommended the use of a device for self-measurement of blood pressure at home as a technology that could help with the diagnosis and counselling of hypertensive patients. Here again, pharmacists are invaluable because it is up to them to appropriately counsel patients about choosing a validated device suited to their needs and abilities. Patients need appropriate training in order to properly use devices for measuring blood pressure and to interpret the results. After getting the results back from the patient, the phar-

macist can then intervene directly or make recommendations to the attending physician, with the aim of helping the patient achieve his or her treatment goals.

It has been proven that patients who participate in a program for monitoring blood pressure play a more active role in maintaining their health and are generally more likely to continue their treatment. Encouraging self-measurement of blood pressure at home can be invaluable in helping pharmacists to improve the effectiveness of antihypertensive treatment for their patients.

### Adhering to and continuing treatment

Nonadherence or stopping treatment severely impedes treatment success for chronic diseases such as hyperten-

sion. Some studies show that nonadherence can be identified in over 50% of hypertension cases. The pharmacist can identify those patients not adhering to their prescribed therapy by monitoring renewals of antihypertensive medication. It is necessary for the pharmacist to work with these patients and sometimes even to notify the prescribing physician, who may also want to work closely with the patient to avoid inappropriate intensification of antihypertensive treatment.

As part of the objective of encouraging a larger number of patients to achieve their targets, the pharmacist must implement strategies that will improve adherence to treatment. The use of combination antihypertensive medications that have a synergistic effect when administered at a fixed dosage could help simplify treatment. In addition, counselling techniques using targeted information and reinforcement may be invaluable in improving treatment consistency.

Whether through assisting with blood pressure monitoring, taking measures to improve adherence, encouraging lifestyle changes, or other interventions targeting the patient's treatment, pharmacists and other health professionals must actively participate to improve regular blood pressure monitoring of their patients. We must become indispensable in helping hypertensive patients achieve their treatment goals! ■



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