
Involving Pharmacists Can Improve Hypertension



According to a new study from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, patients with high blood pressure can benefit from the expanded role played by pharmacists. Findings from the Rural Alberta Clinical Trial in Optimizing Hypertension (RxACTION) are published in the journal *Circulation*.

During the study, the researchers compared conventional treatment of hypertension to "enhanced" pharmacist care. Under the "enhanced" care model, pharmacists were able to independently prescribe antihypertensive drugs and take an active role in managing patients with hypertension. The results show that enhanced care resulted in significant reductions in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure as compared to conventional treatment.

In an interview with *Healthmanagement.org*, Ross Tsuyuki, lead author of the study, professor of medicine at the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, and a member of Alberta Health Services Cardiovascular Health & Stroke Strategic Clinical Network explained that RxACTION is the first randomised trial of pharmacist prescribing. It provides high level evidence for the benefits of this practice that hadn't existed before.

Dr. Tsuyuki believes that the enhanced pharmacist care model could provide important benefits. "Given the great burden of hypertension in the world (it's the number one risk factor for premature death and disability), we think this has public health significance. Indeed, if taken forward, we could have over 300,000 new allies in the US and Canada in the fight against hypertension."

When asked to comment on a possible conflict between the pharmacist and the prescribing doctor under this patient-care model, Dr. Tsuyuki was of the opinion that care provided by pharmacists in the RxACTION study and other studies are not done in a vacuum, but rather bring the family physician into the loop. "In our study, pharmacists informed all involved healthcare professionals of their actions, usually by fax or telephone. This included referring the patient to see their physician when appropriate. We were also careful to engage the physicians in each community to inform them of the study."

Hypertension is a condition that is primarily controlled with drugs. And that is the field where pharmacists excel. The findings from this study clearly demonstrate that there is a huge opportunity to better utilise pharmacists and bring about some major improvements in hypertension control.

Alberta is the first province in Canada and second in the world where pharmacists can apply to prescribe medications independently. Dr. Tsuyuki told *Healthmanagement.org* that other provinces are also looking at this closely. While most cannot yet prescribe, there is a lot that can be done without prescribing. He also said that his research team has recently completed a similarly-designed trial in dyslipidemia (with similarly positive results) and also in type 2 diabetes. "We are just completing follow-up on a large randomised trial of pharmacist-led cardiovascular risk reduction (smoking cessation, hypertension, dyslipidaemia and diabetes management), called RxEACH," Dr. Tsuyuki said.

Source: University of Alberta Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, Interview with *Healthmanagement.org*

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